半蔵の門 PATH OF THE ASSASSIN

VOLUME 15

ONE WHO RULES THE DARK

By KAZUO KOIKE & GOSEKI KOJIMA

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Lifelong Friends, with the Same Dreams,
Striving to Grow into a Rising River.

DARK HORSE MANGA™

半蔵の門 PATH OF THE ASSASSIN

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Chapter One Half a Step Forward

No. 1: Bad Blood, Part 2

IT'S UNBELIEVABLE, BUT A TAKEDA *SUPPA* HAS CONVINCED TSUKIYAMA *GOZEN* TO JOIN THEIR SIDE.

ONE MORE THING. ITOMARU RETURNED FROM OKAZAKI WITH A SURPRISE.

IS THAT RIGHT? TAKEDA KATSUYORI WON THE SURRENDER OF TAKATENJIN CASTLE?

APPARENTLY THE WOMAN, WHOM NOBUYASU CURRENTLY FAVORS, IS ALSO A TAKEDA *SUPPA*.

NOT ONLY THAT, ITOMARU BROUGHT BACK TAKEDA KATSUYORI'S SECRET LETTER, WHICH WAS IN TSUKIYAMA *GOZEN*'S POSSESSION.

I WARNED HANZŌ, THE BEST OF IGA, ABOUT ITOMARU. BUT IT SEEMS THAT EVEN HE COULD NOT STOP THIS FROM BEING EXPOSED.

IT'S A HUGE PROBLEM.

THE LETTER MAKES IT UNDENIABLE THAT TSUKIYAMA GOZEN AND NOBUYASU ARE IN LEAGUE WITH TAKEDA.

TSUKIYAMA-*SAMA* WAS PROBABLY CARELESS, ESPECIALLY IF THE LETTER WAS GENUINE.

NO ONE PUTS AWAY A SECRET LETTER VERY CAREFULLY.

HMMM.

I IMAGINE THEIR CONSPIRATOR INTENTIONALLY PLACED THE LETTER WHERE IT WAS EASY TO STEAL.

SO YOU BELIEVE THAT TSUKIYAMA GOZEN WAS INDEED HAVING AN AFFAIR WITH A TAKEDA *SUPPA?*

ITOMARU MUST'VE SEEN TSUKIYAMA-*SAMA* SLEEPING WITH THE MAN, WHICH PROBABLY BLINDED ITOMARU FROM REALIZING IT'S A SETUP.

HMMM.

CHANCES ARE SHE WAS TAKEN BY SURPRISE, RAPED, AND BECAME INSEPARABLE FROM HIM. THAT'S PROBABLY WHAT HAPPENED.

I DON'T THINK ITOMARU GAVE A FALSE REPORT. TSUKIYAMA-*SAMA* SLEEPS IN HER PRIVATE CHAMBER.

IT'S STRANGE INDEED.

IF NOBUYASU-*DONO'S* LOVER IS FROM TAKEDA, HOW WAS SHE ABLE TO GET INSIDE OKAZAKI? I GUESS TSUKIYAMA-*SAMA* LET HER IN...BUT SHE'D NEVER ALLOW A TAKEDA WOMAN TO BECOME INTIMATE WITH NOBUYASU-*DONO*...

I...I GOT IT!

WHAT IF TSUKIYAMA-*SAMA* DIDN'T KNOW? THE *SUPPA* WHO'S SCHEMING BEHIND HER MUST HAVE SET THEM UP, JUST LIKE HE PLANTED THE SECRET LETTER.

...
...

TAKEDA IS PLOTTING TO DESTROY THE ODA-TOKUGAWA ALLIANCE.

KATSUYORI IS ON THE MOVE. HE EVEN TOOK OVER TAKATENJIN CASTLE.

HMMM... OF COURSE.

IF THAT'S THE CASE, KATSUYORI WOULD STAY PUT.

YOU DON'T THINK SO?

IF IT WAS TAKEDA'S SCHEME, KATSUYORI WOULD SIT TIGHT AND WAIT UNTIL ODA AND TOKUGAWA SEPARATED.

IEYASU-*DONO* IS WAGING WAR HEAD ON AGAINST KATSUYORI AND HAS REPEATEDLY URGED MILORD TO FIGHT ALONGSIDE HIM.

PLEASE DO NOT WORRY. I FEEL UNUSUALLY WELL TONIGHT.

ARE YOU OKAY, HANBEI?

NOW THAT KATSUYORI IS ON THE MOVE, MILORD WOULD HAVE TO TURN A BLIND EYE TO TSUKIYAMA *GOZEN* AND NOBUYASU-*DONO*, AND JOIN FORCES WITH IEYASU-*DONO*.

WHAT IF KATSUYORI STAYED PUT? WHAT WOULD MILORD HAVE DONE?

CLEARLY, NEITHER IEYASU-*SAMA* NOR HANZŌ-*DONO* KNEW ANYTHING WAS GOING ON. NOBUNAGA-*SAMA* MUST BELIEVE THIS IS TRUE.

ACCORDING TO ITOMARU, HANZŌ, THE BEST OF IGA, INSISTED THAT IEYASU-*DONO* HAS NO TRICKS PLANNED AND THAT THERE WAS NO NEED TO WORRY ABOUT OKAZAKI WITH HANZŌ AND HIS PEOPLE KEEPING WATCH.

THAT'S THE THING.

PROBABLY CONDEMNED NOBUYASU-*DONO* AND TSUKIYAMA-*SAMA*. HE WOULD'VE CLAIMED THEIR HEADS.

WHAT IF IEYASU-*DONO* IS ASKED TO GIVE UP HIS WIFE AND SON...

QUITE EASILY, TO NOBUNAGA-*SAMA'S* SURPRISE.

HE WILL HAND IN THEIR HEADS.

THAT'S WHAT MAKES IEYASU-*SAMA* FORMIDABLE.

NO... WOULD HE?!

IF HE WAS AN AVERAGE WARLORD, HE'D WORRY ABOUT MAKING A SPECTACLE OF HIMSELF AND BECOMING A LAUGHINGSTOCK, AND IN A RAGE, HE'D SEVER TIES WITH NOBUNAGA-*DONO*. BUT IN IEYASU-*SAMA'S* CASE, HE WILL STOMACH IT.

THAT'S WHY I BELIEVE HE WILL NEVER ACT RASHLY.

WHEN I LOOK AT HIM, I SEE A MAN WHO'S SUCCEEDED IN THE WORLD BY ENDURING THROUGHOUT HIS LIFE, FROM THE TIME THAT HE WAS A HOSTAGE UNTIL TODAY. WITH HIS ABILITY TO ENDURE, HE'S ALWAYS JUDGED VERY WELL HOW THE WORLD WORKS.

I BELIEVE HE HAS A TREMENDOUS CAPACITY TO SURVIVE ANYTHING.

UR... HM.

THE MAN WHO KNOWS HIS ABILITY TO ENDURE IS NOBUNAGA-*SAMA*. THAT'S WHY NOBUNAGA-*SAMA* CAN DEMAND THEIR HEADS WITHOUT FEAR.

BECAUSE THEY SIMPLY CAN'T FATHOM HOW MUCH IEYASU-*DONO* CAN TAKE.

YOU'RE SAYING TAKEDA'S SCHEME WOULD'VE FAILED EVEN IF KATSUYORI DIDN'T STIR.

BUT SOONER OR LATER HE WILL?

HE HASN'T DONE IT YET ONLY BECAUSE HE GIVES REAL WEIGHT TO HOW THE TOKUGAWA VASSALS MIGHT REACT.

CRUNCH CRUNCH

HOW SAD.

IT'S ABOUT THE BLOOD OF IMAGAWA VERSUS ODA.

THIS CONFRON-TATION IS ABOUT THE BIGGEST BLOOD-LINES.

WILL YOU LET ME HAVE OYŌ-DONO?

HANBEI, WHAT ABOUT TAKENAKA'S BLOOD?

WHA... WHAT DO YOU MEAN?

I'D FEEL SORRY FOR THE CHILD.

NO, I MUST REFUSE.

IF YOUR SISTER AND I PRODUCE A CHILD, TAKENAKA'S BLOOD WILL LAST AND PROSPER.

NEITHER NOBUNAGA-*SAMA* NOR YOU HAVE FORBEARANCE, MILORD!

SINCE MY LIFE WILL SOON END, I DARE SAY THIS.

WHA...

MY VIEW IS THAT IT'S A MAN WITH EXCELLENT PATIENCE WHO WILL SEIZE CONTROL OF THE COUNTRY.

BLEHH!!

YOU SHOULD DO IT, MILORD, FOR YOUR OWN SAKE. IF YOU ARE COMMITTED TO THIS, I WILL OFFER MY SISTER TO YOU...

MILORD, WHEN YOU SEE AN OPPORTUNITY, KILL IEYASU-*SAMA*.

CAN NOBUNAGA-*SAMA* DO THE SAME?

DO YOU HAVE THE STOMACH TO HAND OVER THE HEADS OF YOUR WIFE AND YOUR CHILD?!

KOFF KOFF KOFF

...AND KILL HIM WITHOUT QUESTION.

IF IEYASU IS A MAN WHO CAN... LOOK FOR YOUR OPPORTUNITY...

BLEH!

疾如風徐如林侵掠如火不動如山

MOVE AS SWIFT AS A WIND, STAY AS SILENT AS A FOREST ATTACK AS FIERCE AS FIRE, DEFEND AS UNMOVABLE AS A MOUNTAIN.

IT WAS SO STUPID OF ME. I DO REGRET IT.

SHINGEN'S DEATH WAS UNEXPECTED.

SHLUP

ニヒ

ATTEMPTING TO TEAM UP WITH KATSUYORI MAKES ME A LAUGHABLE FOOL.

THAT'S WHAT MADE HIM DIFFERENT FROM KATSU-YORI.

SHINGEN MADE GOOD USE OF *SUPPA*, BUT HE WASN'T THE KIND OF WARLORD WHO'D LISTEN TO A *SUPPA'S* WORDS.

WITH SHINGEN'S DEATH, THE GREAT IRON RING THAT KEPT NOBUNAGA IN CHECK COLLAPSED.

AHH, I'M SO SORRY TO HAVE LOST A GREAT MAN LIKE SHINGEN. WHO WOULD HAVE THOUGHT HIS DEATH WOULD CLEAR THE PATH FOR NOBUNAGA TO BECOME THE SUPREME RULER?

NOBUNAGA DEFEATED AZAI NAGAMASA IN ESHŪ. NEXT, HE ATTACKED ICHIJŌDANI, FORCING ASAKURA YOSHIKAGE TO TAKE HIS OWN LIFE. AND THEN HE TOOK OVER ODANI CASTLE, COMPELLING NAGAMASA TO KILL HIMSELF.

WHILE BEGGING NOBUNAGA FOR PEACE, SHOGUN YOSHIAKI RAN TO KAWACHI IN FEAR.

KATSUYORI WAS THE LAST HOPE.

NOW THAT NOBUNAGA PACIFIED THE *IKKŌ-IKKI* IN NAGASHIMA, THERE'S NO ONE WHO STANDS IN HIS WAY.

THAT'S WHY...

...DESPITE THAT... IT'S ALL OVER.

BUT...

...ONLY FOR THAT REASON, I WANTED TO TURN KATSUYORI INTO A MAN WHO COULD BLOCK NOBUNAGA.

SHAMITAVI

SHAME

CHITTE

HARITE

ANYE MANYE

MAMANE

MUKTA-TAME

SHANTE MUKTE

AVASHAME

SAME

CHITTE

CREAK

SHAMI-
TAVI

HARITE

MUKTA-
TAME

SHANTE
MUKTE

CHITTE

HARITE

MUKTE

MUKTA-
TAME

SHANTE

SHAME

IT DOESN'T EXCITE ME TO RAPE A WOMAN I STOLE AWAY AND FED A NUMBING AGENT.

HOW
SAD.

悼疼
如知
不徐
勃如
如林
山徐

UR...

UNLESS I SHRED HIM TO RAGS AND FINISH HIM OFF...

AND THAT DESPICABLE HANZŌ WILL BE THROWING HIS WEIGHT AROUND.

TAKEDA WILL PERISH SOON. THE REIGN OF ODA AND TOKUGAWA WILL COME.

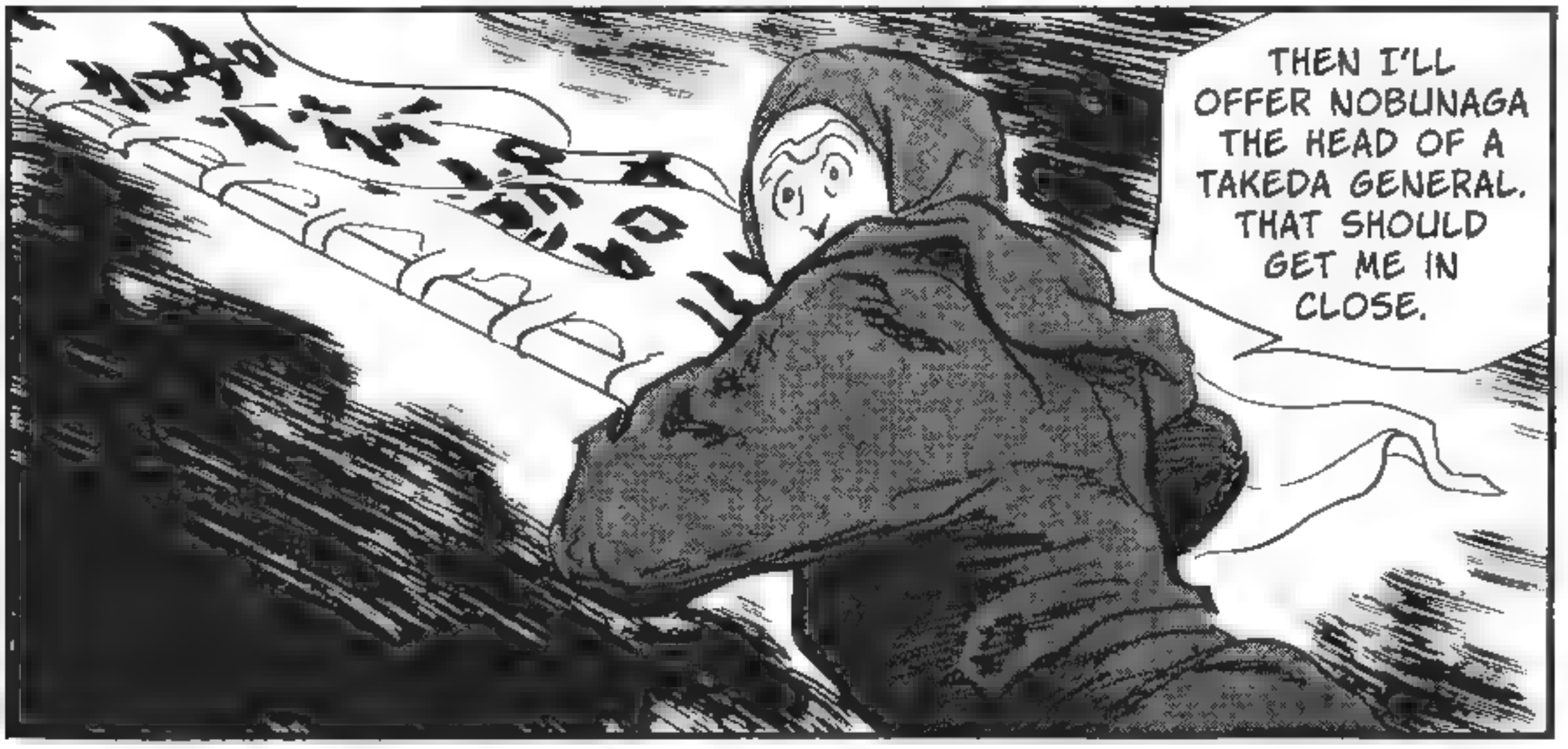
I HAVE NO CHOICE NOW.

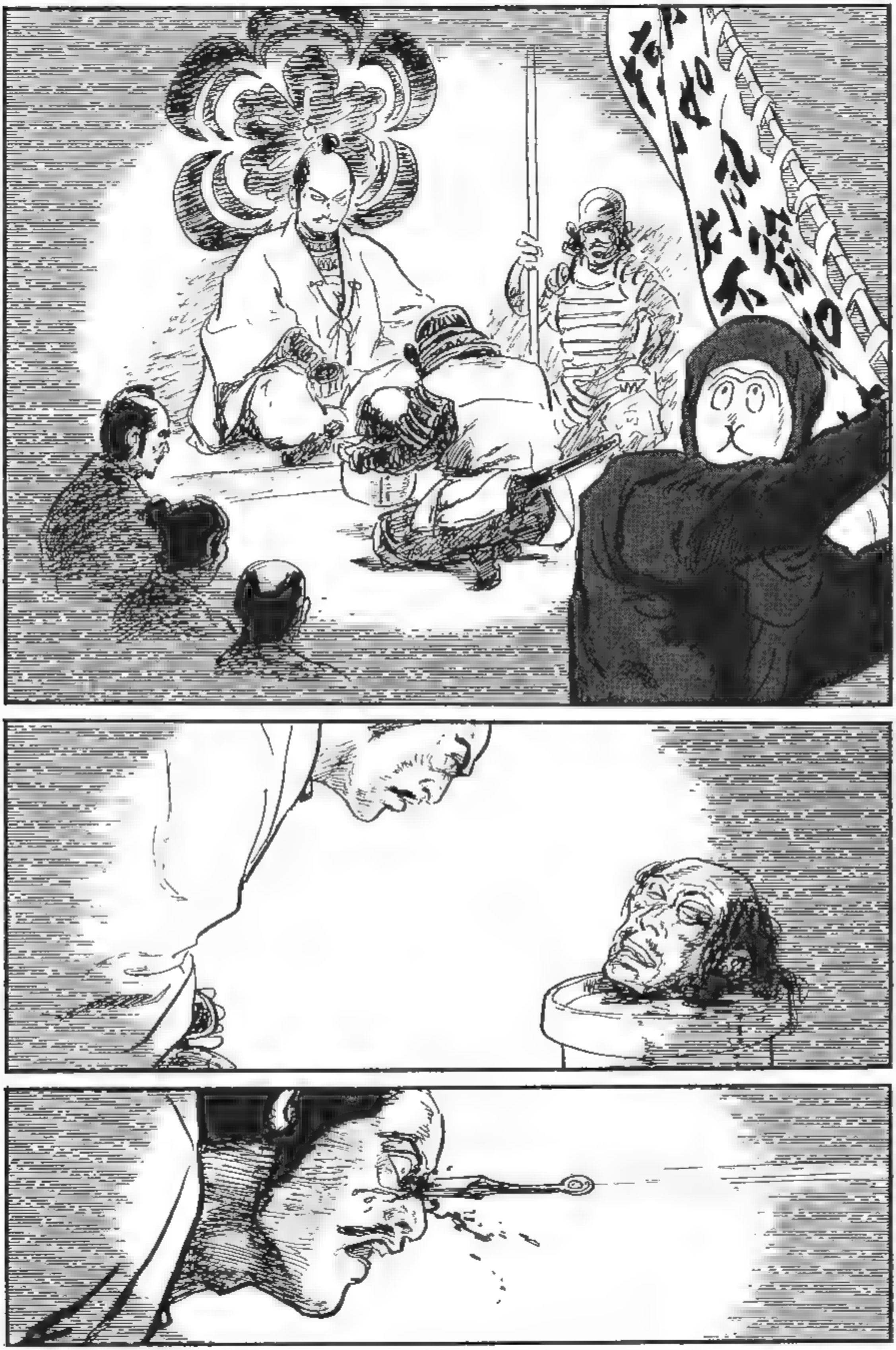
MY BURNING GRUDGE WILL NEVER BE QUENCHED.

I WILL TERMINATE NOBU-NAGA!!

I WILL...

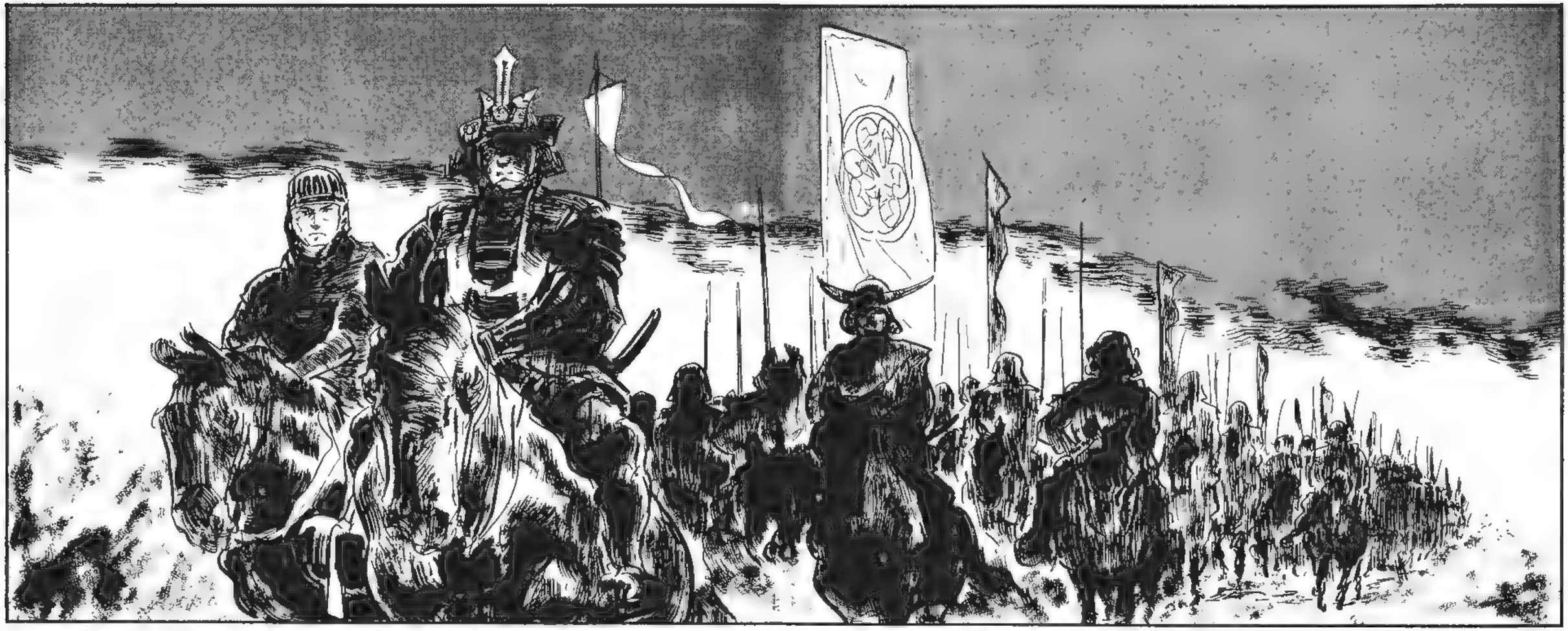
FLUP
I'VE GOT AN IDEA. I'LL KILL AN ODA GENERAL AND ASSUME HIS IDENTITY.

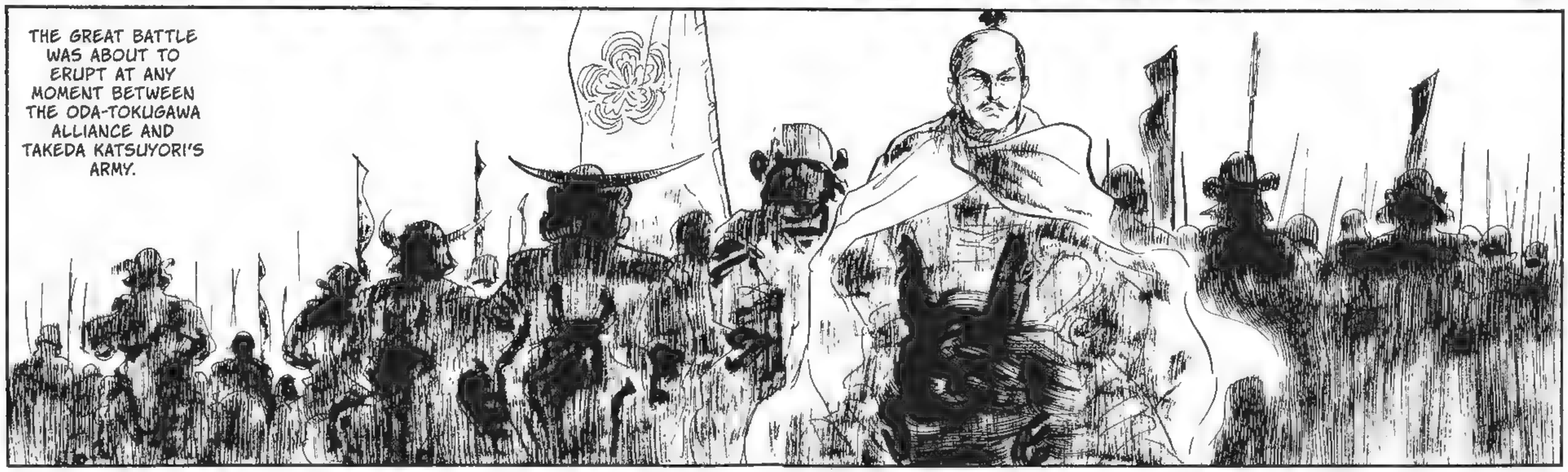

THEN I'LL OFFER NOBUNAGA THE HEAD OF A TAKEDA GENERAL. THAT SHOULD GET ME IN CLOSE.

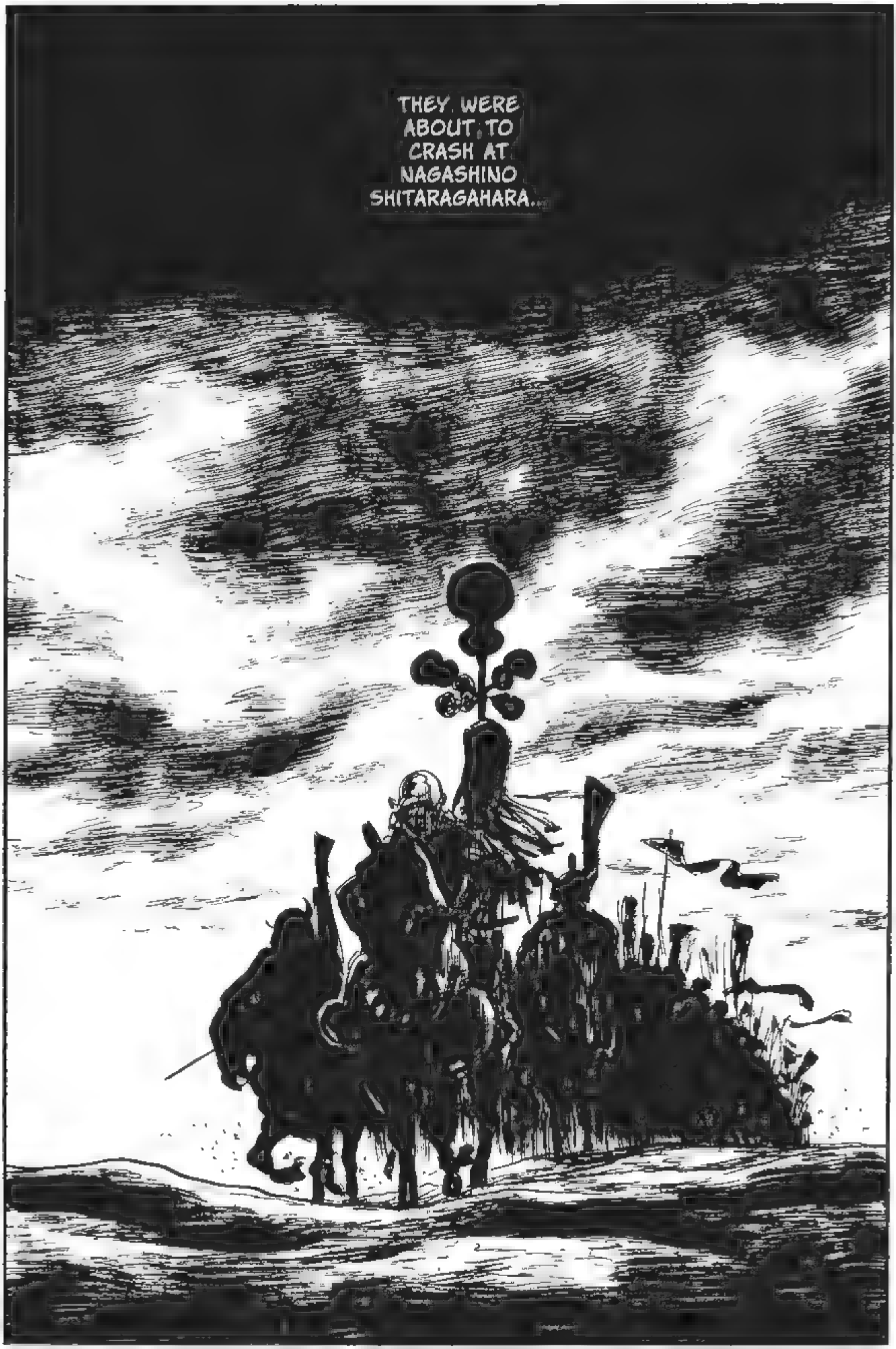


I'LL DO IT.

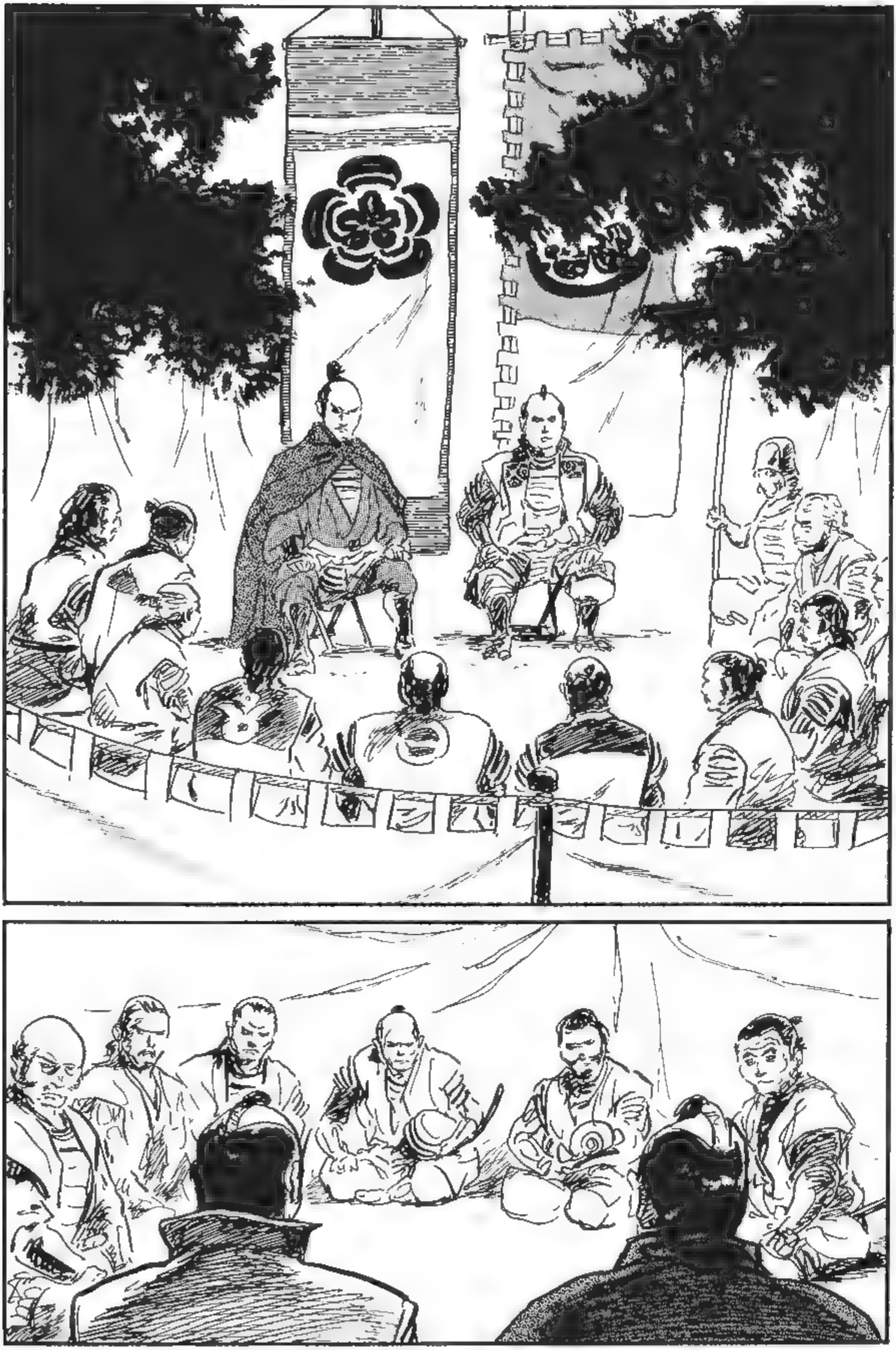
I WILL!




THE GREAT BATTLE WAS ABOUT TO ERUPT AT ANY MOMENT BETWEEN THE ODA-TOKUGAWA ALLIANCE AND TAKEDA KATSUYORI'S ARMY.


THEY WERE ABOUT TO CRASH AT NAGASHINO SHITARAGAHARA...

ON MAY 18TH, AT DAWN. THE ODA-TOKUGAWA ALLIANCE ARRIVED AT SHITARAGAHARA, LOCATED ONE AND A HALF *LI* FROM NAGASHINO.



THREE THOU-SAND.

YOU'VE BROUGHT A GREAT MANY MUSKETS, BUT EXACTLY HOW MANY ARE THERE?

IEYASU-*DONO*, WHAT DO YOU THINK OF BATTLES WITH GUNS?

BUT IT TAKES TOO LONG BEFORE THE SECOND ROUND CAN BE FIRED.

THERE ARE BOTH PROS AND CONS. IF YOU LINE UP AND FIRE THREE THOUSAND MUSKETS, THE FIRST ROUND OF SHOTS WILL BE TREMENDOUSLY POWERFUL INDEED.

HEH...

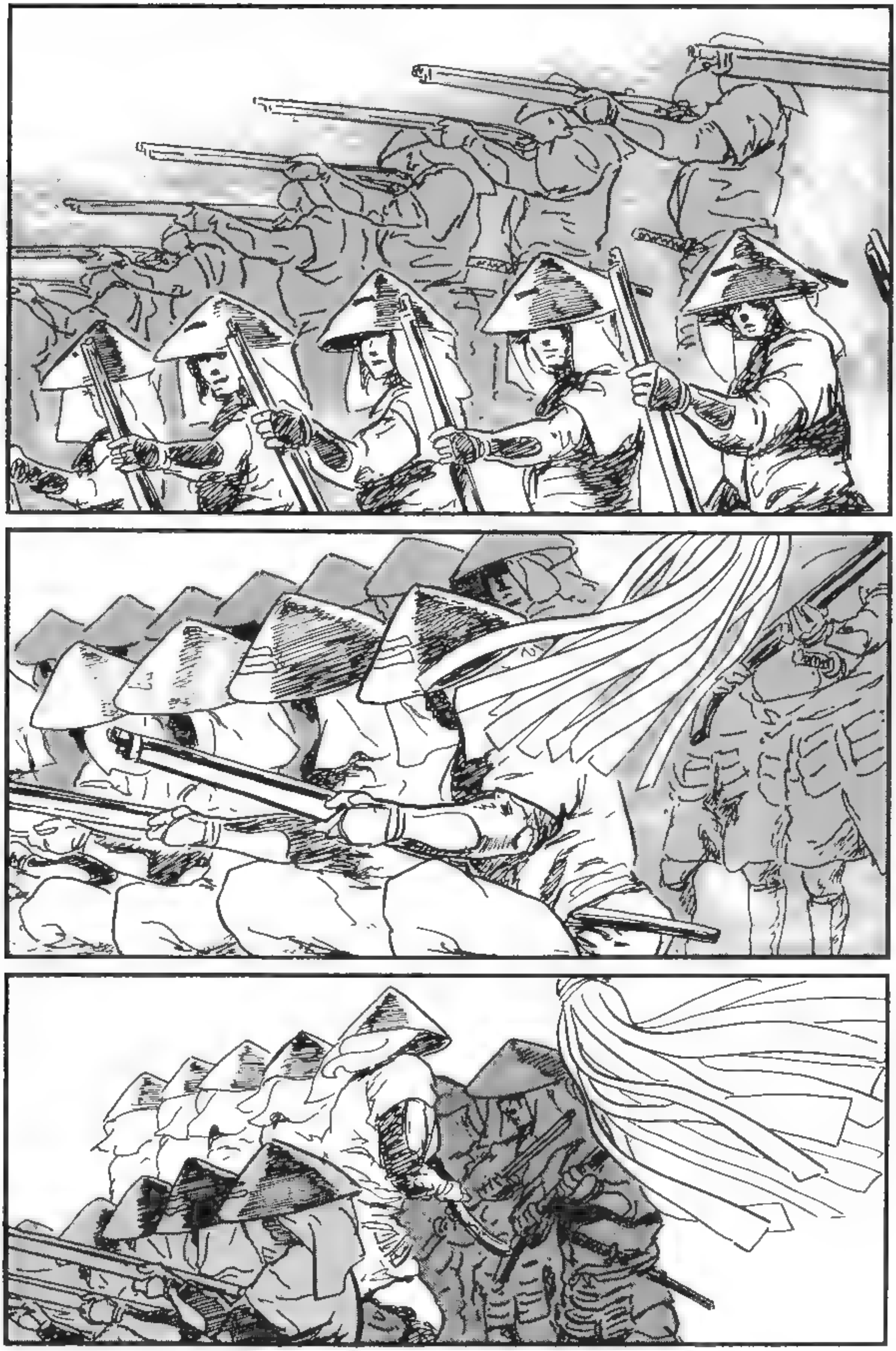
THEY'LL DODGE THE FIRST ROUND OF BULLETS, THEN THROW DOWN THEIR ARMOR AND ATTACK US LIKE A RAGING STORM BEFORE THE SECOND ROUND CAN BE...

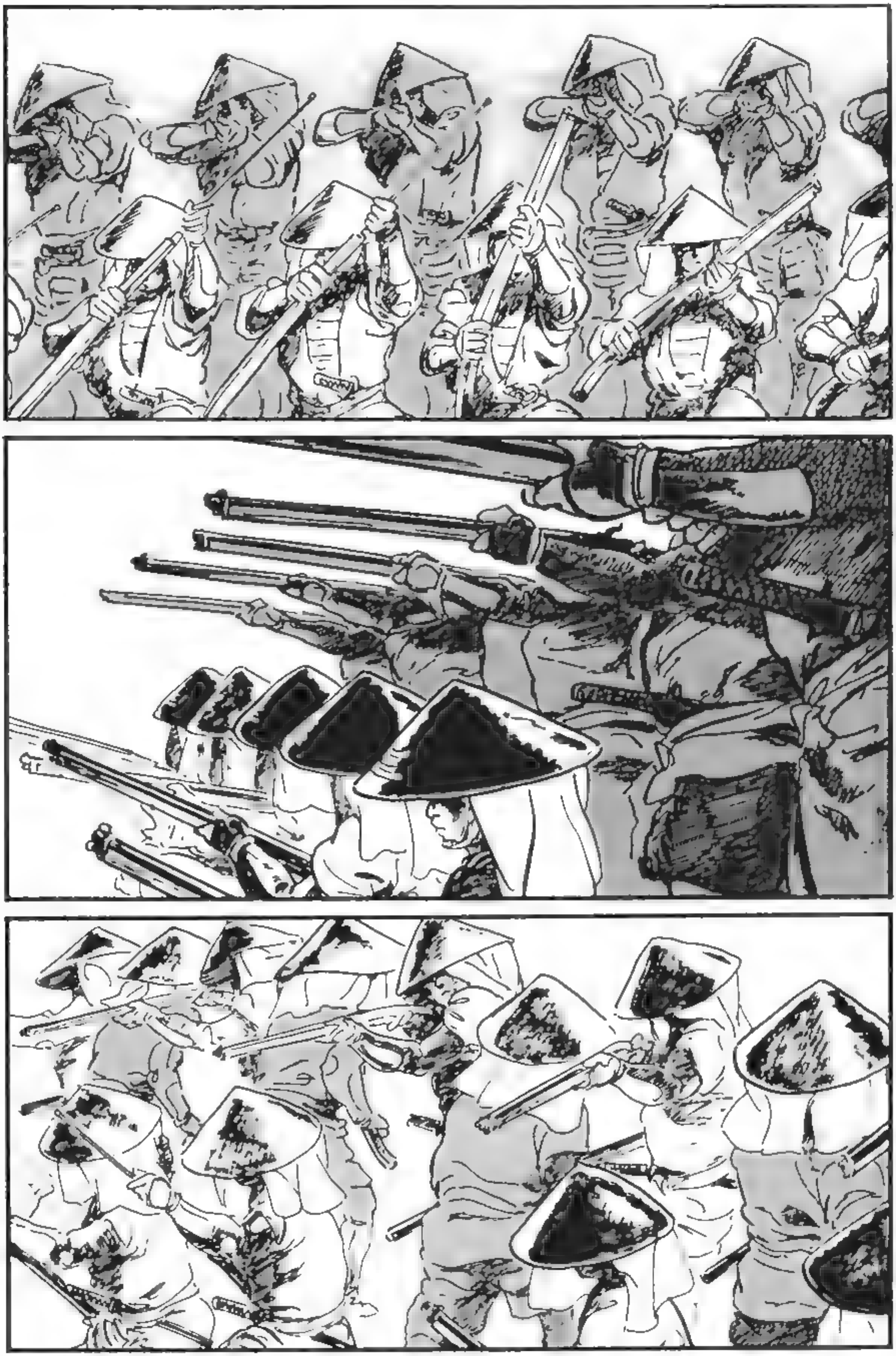
TAKEDA'S CAVALRY ARE VERY WELL AWARE OF IT. THEY'LL CHARGE IN WITH IRON-PLATED SHIELDS IN FRONT OF THEIR HORSES.

BUT THIS TIME THEIR INVINCIBILITY WILL BE THEIR DOWNFALL.

IT'S TRUE, TAKEDA'S CAVALRY ARE POWERFUL.

HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA





WITH SUCH AN ARRANGE-MENT...

MMM... I SEE.

YES, SIR.

TOKUGAWA'S MUSKET UNITS SHOULD USE THE SAME FORMATION.

TAKE UP POSITION ALONG THE RENGOGAWA RIVER, DIG TRENCHES, BUILD EARTHWORKS, AND ERECT FENCES UP FRONT TO FEND OFF HORSES.

NOW LISTEN!

WORK THROUGH THE NIGHT UNTIL THE JOB IS DONE.

UNDER-STAND?!

TRIPLE UP THE WOODEN FENCES TO BLOCK THEIR CAVALRY, AND DON'T FORGET THE WICKETS.

EVER SINCE, I HAVEN'T STOPPED THINKING ABOUT GUNS.

WHEN WE ATTACKED ISHIYAMA, WE SUFFERED THE MERCILESS ONSLAUGHT OF THE SAIGASHŪ MUSKET-EERS.

IT WAS FOR THE SAME REASON, IEYASU-*DONO*.

I ALSO TOOK OVER KUNITOMOMURA AND NEGORO, WHERE GUNS ARE MANU-FACTURED.

I TOOK CONTROL OF SAKAI AND PERMITTED MISSIONARIES TO PREACH THERE. THEY WERE NOT IRRELEVANT TO MY WEAPONS STRATEGY.

HERE AND NOW, AT LONG LAST, I AM PREPARED FOR THIS. HA HA HA HA HA.

EVEN THOUGH SHINGEN ACKNOWLEDGED THE POWER OF FIREARMS, HE HESITATED TO ORGANIZE MUSKET UNITS BECAUSE IT TOOK TOO LONG TO LOAD AND FIRE A SECOND ROUND.

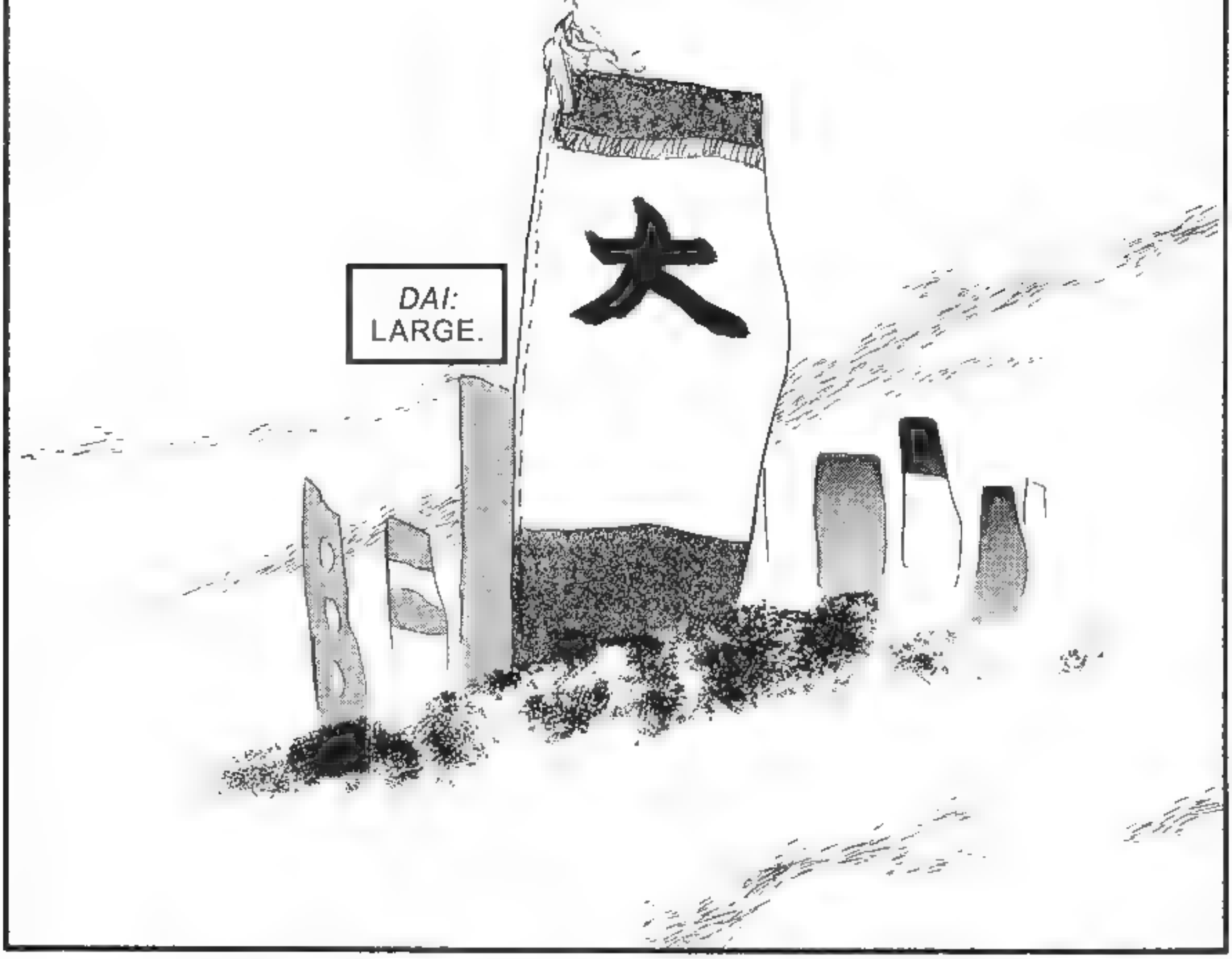
BUT ONCE PROVEN EFFEC-TIVE, OTHER WAR-LORDS WOULD BE LEFT SPEECH-LESS.

MORE THAN EVER, IEYASU THOUGHT NOBUNAGA WAS TRULY AND POSITIVELY A TERRIFYING MAN.

HM.

HE IS POSITIONED IN MOUNT ITAO.

WHERE IS NOBU-YASU?


DAI:
LARGE.

FŪRINKAZAN IS SHINGEN'S FLAG. I WONDER IF KATSUYORI WANTS TO FLAUNT THE NEW FLAG TO SHOW IT'S HIS OWN.

OHO. IN PLACE OF THE *FŪRINKAZAN* FLAG MARK, HE CHOSE THE *KANJI* CHARACTER *DAI*.

FROM NOW ON, BATTLES WILL BE ABOUT TROOP STRENGTH AND GUNS, WHICH LEAVES NO ROOM FOR SWORDS. INDIVIDUAL FLAG MARKS WILL BECOME USELESS THEN.

BUT TIMES ARE CHANGING. SOON ENOUGH, FLAG MARKS WILL LOSE THEIR SIGNIFICANCE.

PROBABLY.

TRUM TRUM TRUM

AND IT'S ABOUT TO BE DEMONSTRATED...

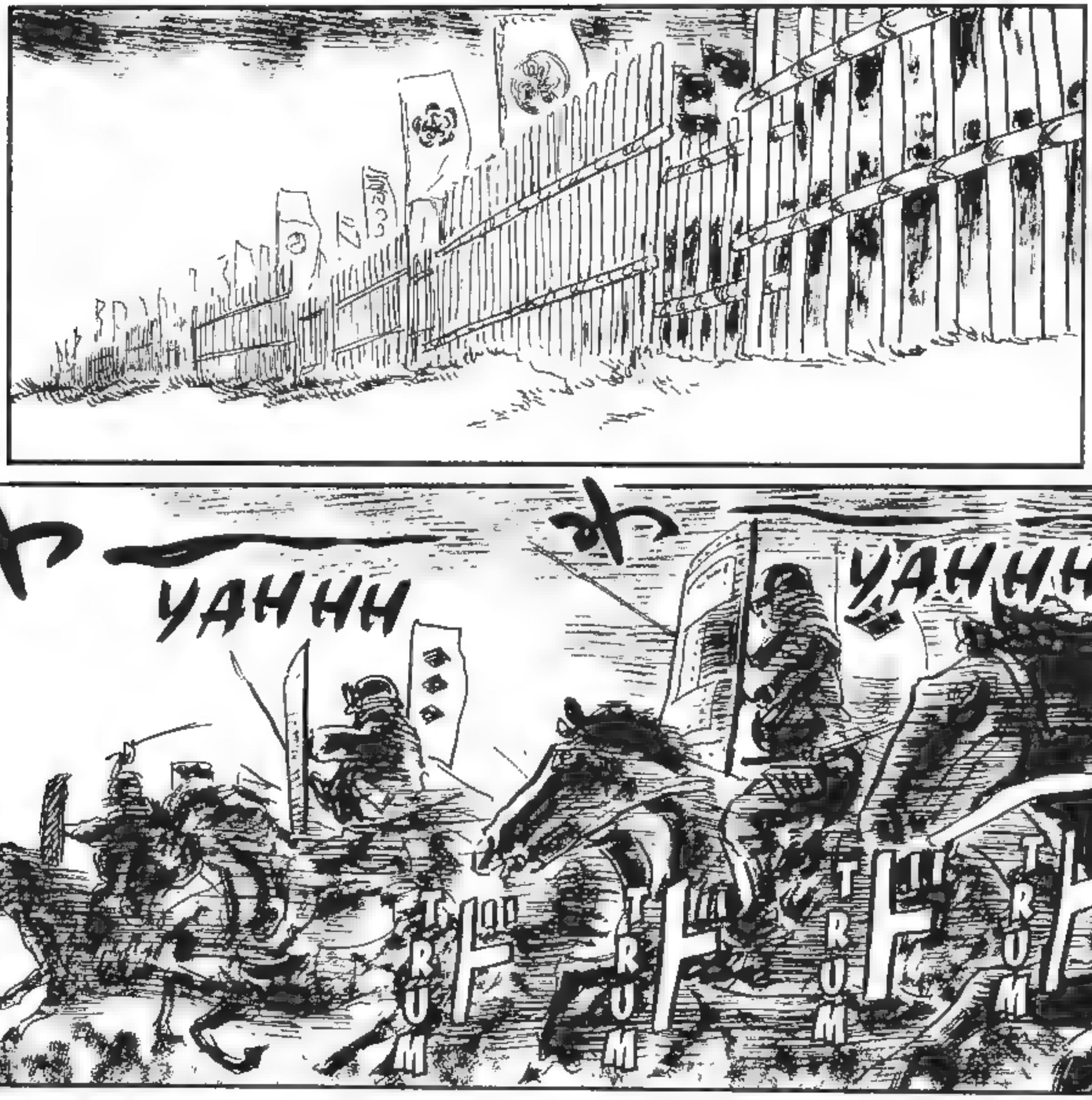
TRUM
TRUM
TRUM
TRUM
YAHHHH

TRUM

TRUM

TRUM

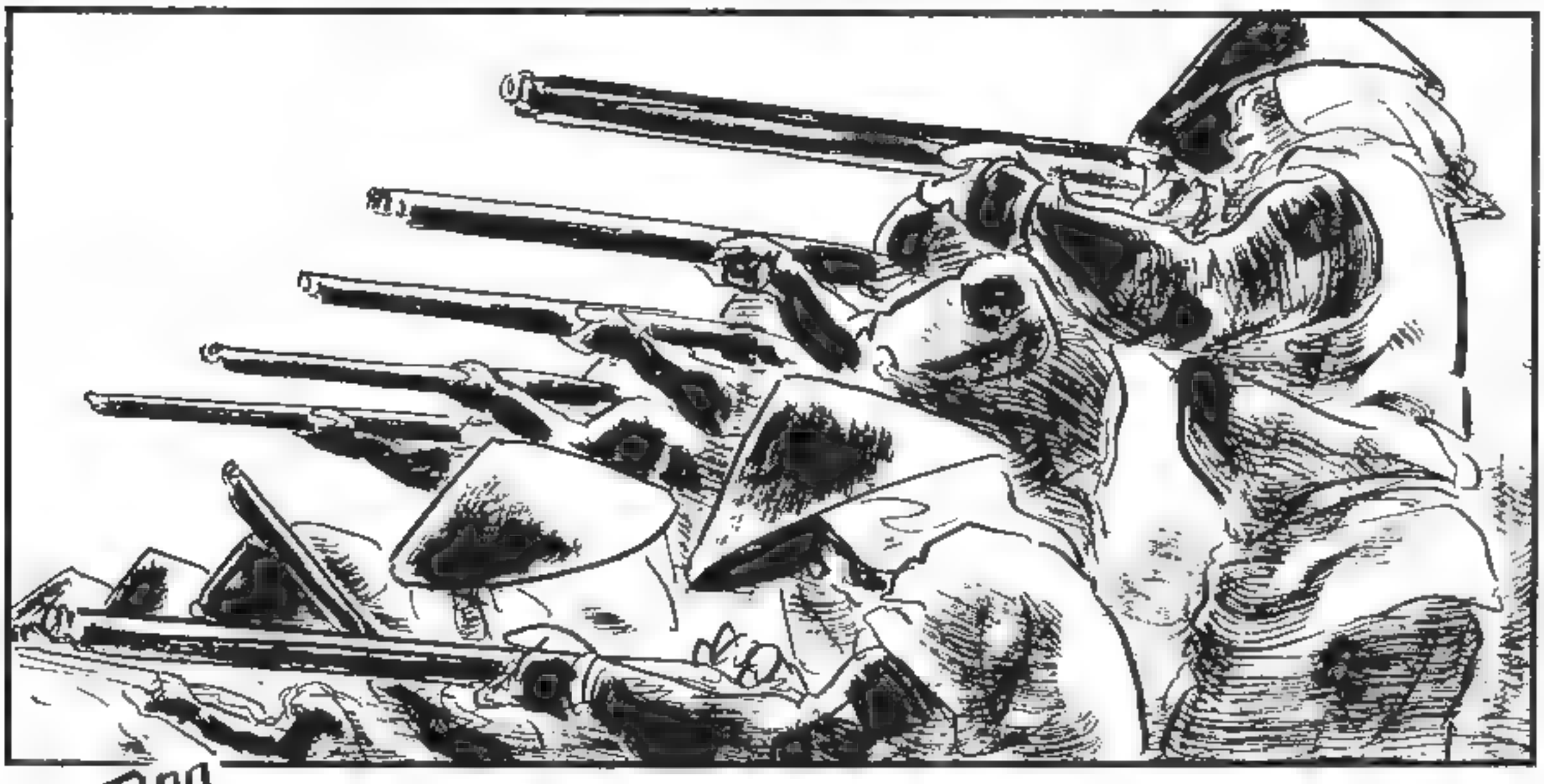
YANNN YAN


YAHHH
YAHHH
TRUM
TRUM
TRUM
TRUM
TRUM
TRUM

FIRE!

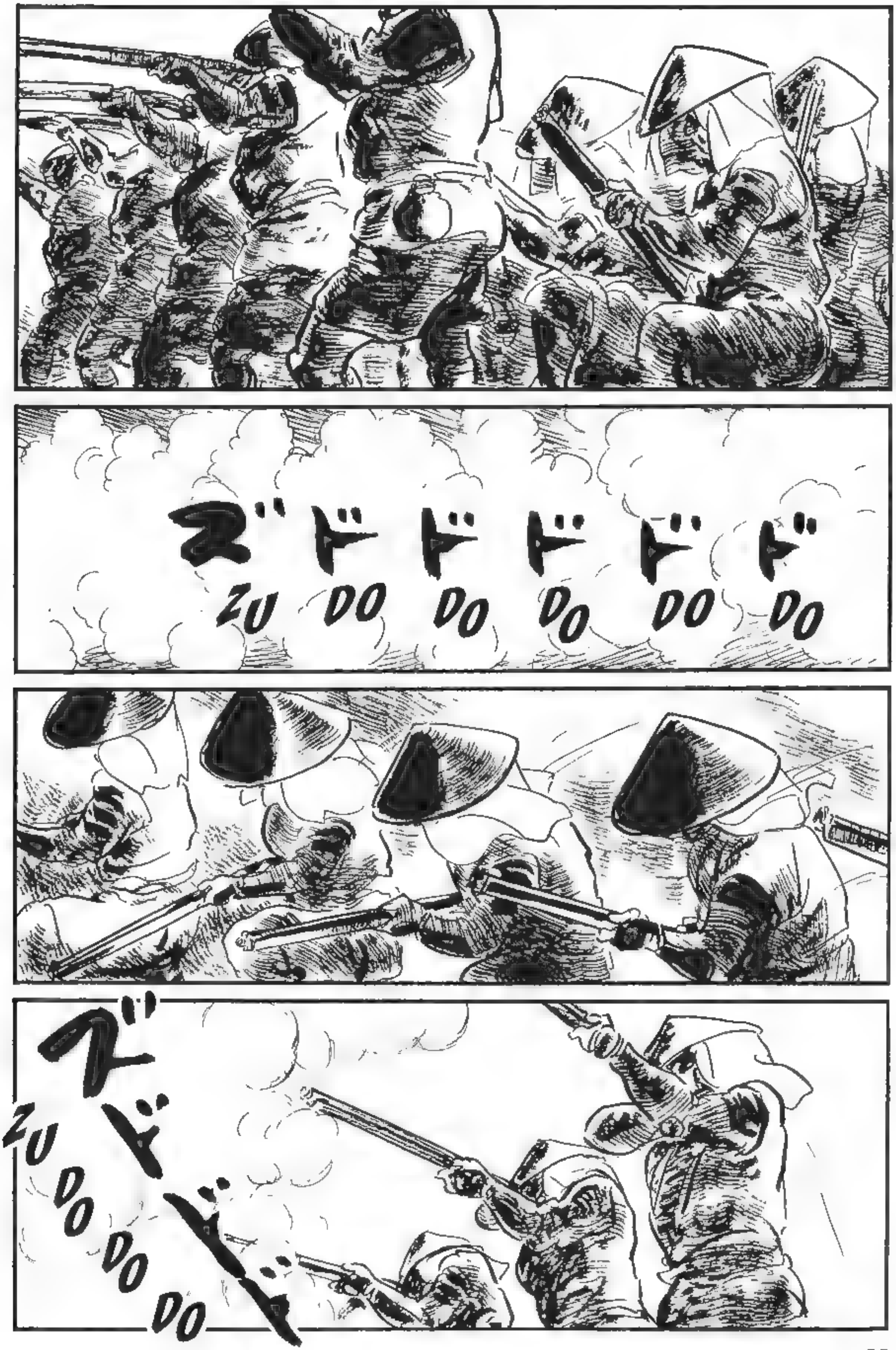
R"
F"
F"
F"
F"

YAHHHH!!



FIRE!

FIRE!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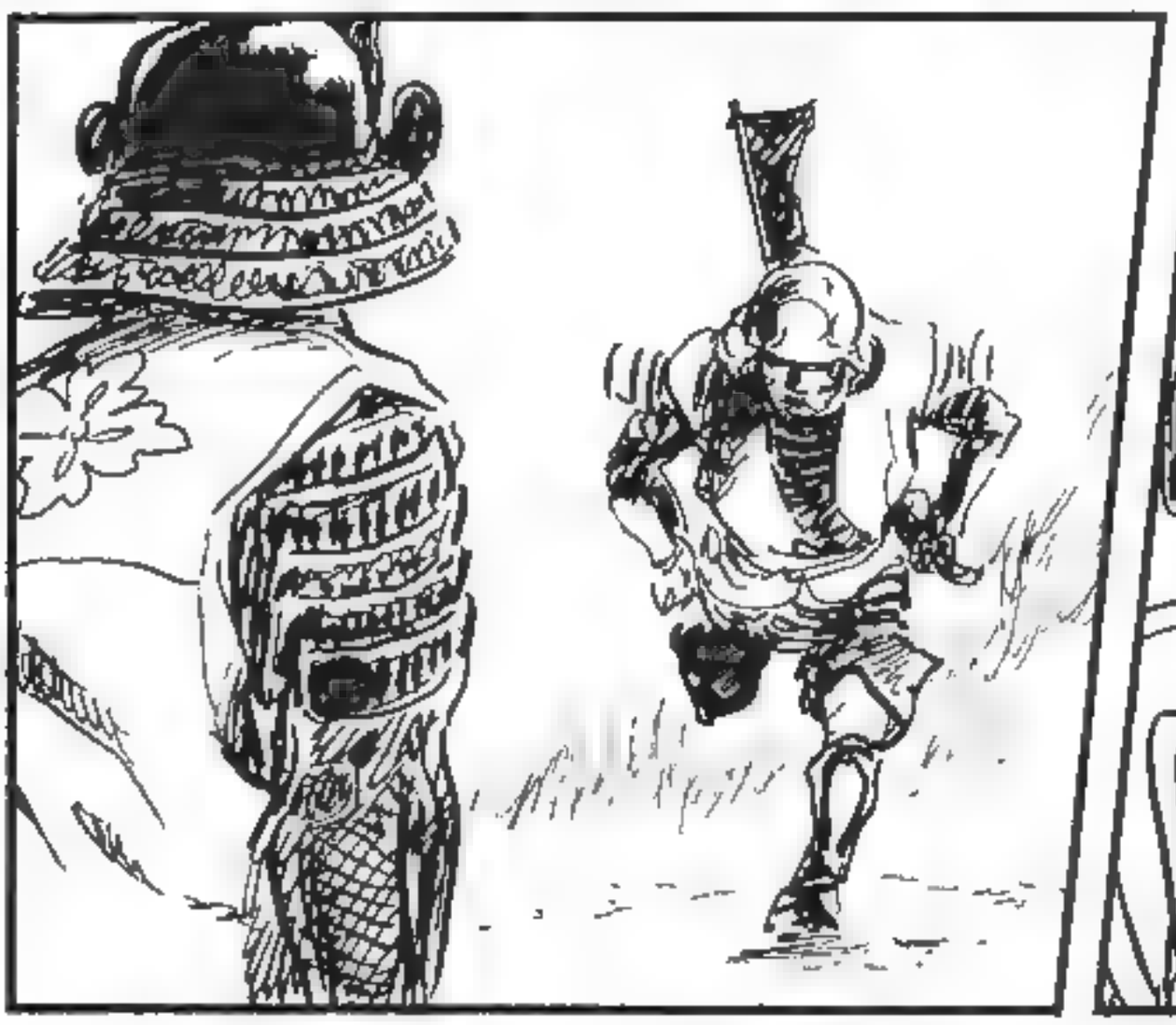


...
...

TOBIGASU CASTLE FELL, AND NOBUZANE-*SAMA* DIED DURING THE BATTLE.
SAKAI TADATSUGU OF TOKUGAWA BROUGHT THREE THOUSAND MEN AND ATTACKED OUR TROOPS AT MT. TOBIGASU.

I WAS... I WAS JUST THINKING...THAT I SHOULD ORDER THE TROOPS IN MT. TOBIGASU TO STRIKE ODA-TOKUGAWA FROM BEHIND.

...
...

MY GOD...

GOD...

MY GOD...

SLIPPING INTO THEIR SWORDS-AND-BAYONETS FIGHT, SLICING OFF THE HEAD OF A TAKEDA GENERAL, BRINGING IT TO BE INSPECTED AND MURDERING NOBUNAGA--THAT HAD BEEN SASUKE'S PLAN, BUT IN AN INSTANT HE KNEW IT WAS POINTLESS.

THEY... DIDN'T STAND A CHANCE...

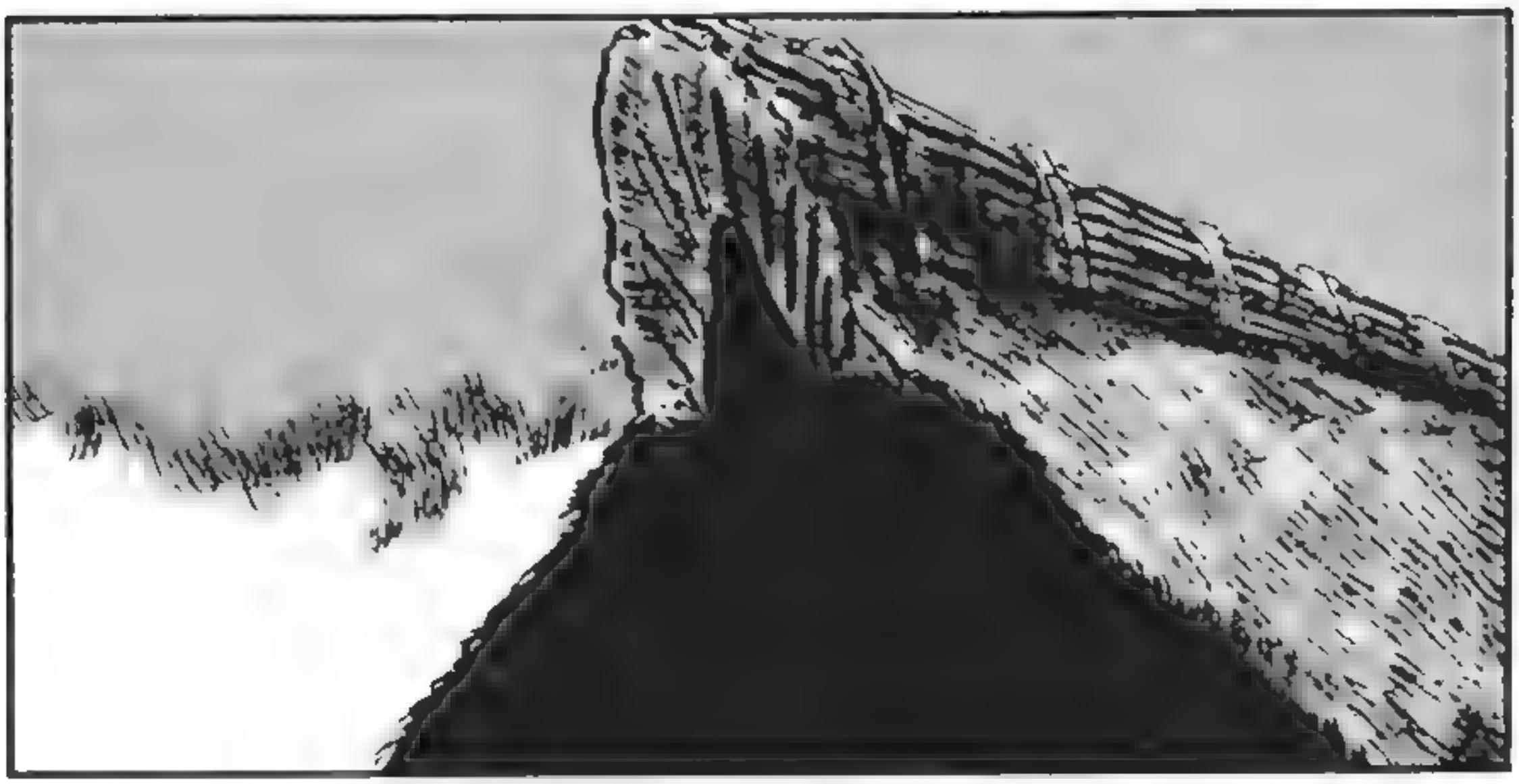
NO ONE FOUGHT WITH BLADES, AND NO ONE SCRAMBLED TO CUT OFF THEIR ENEMIES' HEADS. HAVING WITNESSED NOBUNAGA'S MODERN WARFARE, THIS OLD-TIME *SUPPA* COULD ONLY TREMBLE IN SHOCK.

HOW TERRIFYING GUNS WERE. FACED WITH AN ORGANIZED MUSKET UNIT, HE REALIZED THE FUTILITY OF HIS PAST EFFORTS. EVEN IF HE CAUSED TSUKIYAMA AND NOBUYASU TO DRIVE A WEDGE BETWEEN TOKUGAWA AND ODA, HOW MUCH COULD IT HAVE FURTHERED HIS CAUSE...?

IT WAS AS CLEAR AS DAY. IEYASU WOULD NEVER DISOBEY NOBUNAGA, WHO POSSESSED SUCH A WELL-ORGANIZED MODERN ARMY.

BEFORE THAT HAPPENS, LET ME SETTLE THINGS WITH HIM ONE ON ONE. AND THEN I'LL DISAPPEAR TOO.

THE *SUPPA'S* WORLD WILL CHANGE TOO. THERE WILL BE NEW KINDS OF *SHINOBI* GROUPS. AND HANZŌ, THE BEST OF IGA, WILL NO DOUBT BE REPRESENTING THE NEW *SUPPA*.



THE MOMENT HE SAW THAT ODA'S MUSKETMEN NUMBERED IN THE THOUSANDS, HE SHOULD HAVE DECISIVELY AND PROMPTLY TRIED TO SLOW THE FIGHTING.

TAKEDA KATSUYORI-*DONO'S* BEST CHANCE AT WINNING WAS TO HAVE A PROTRACTED WAR.

FAK FAK FAK

THERE ARE TWO BROOKS THAT RUN PARALLEL BEFORE CONVERGING INTO THE RENGOGAWA. FURTHER DOWN, IT FLOWS INTO TOYOKAWA RIVER.

IT TAKES TIME FOR A GREAT ARMY TO MOVE. THE NARROW LAND MAKES IT EVEN MORE DIFFICULT TO MANEUVER AN ARMY OF MORE THAN TEN THOUSAND.

SHITARAGAHARA IS A LONG, NARROW HIGHLAND...WHICH STRETCHES NORTH AND SOUTH...

IF TAKEDA WENT FOR A DRAWN-OUT WAR AND CONCENTRATED THEIR MAIN FORCE AT MT. TOBIGASU, IT WOULD'VE TURNED INTO A MOUNTAIN BATTLE. HAVING MARCHED A LONG DISTANCE, ODA WOULD'VE HAD TROUBLE GETTING SUPPLIES, AND THEIR MORALE WOULD HAVE BEEN AFFECTED, TOO, GIVING TAKEDA A DECISIVE EDGE.

IN A PLACE LIKE THAT, ODA, WHICH MAINLY CONSISTS OF MUSKET UNITS, HAS THE ADVANTAGE.

KATSUYORI-*DONO*, HOWEVER, WAS PROBABLY IN POSITION TO ALTER THE FLAG MARK AND FLAUNT HIS SUPERIORITY OVER SHINGEN-*KŌ* TO EVERYONE, BOTH INTERNALLY AND EXTERNALLY.

ALL HUMAN.

ALL PSYCHOLOGY.

THIS IS ALL FATE.

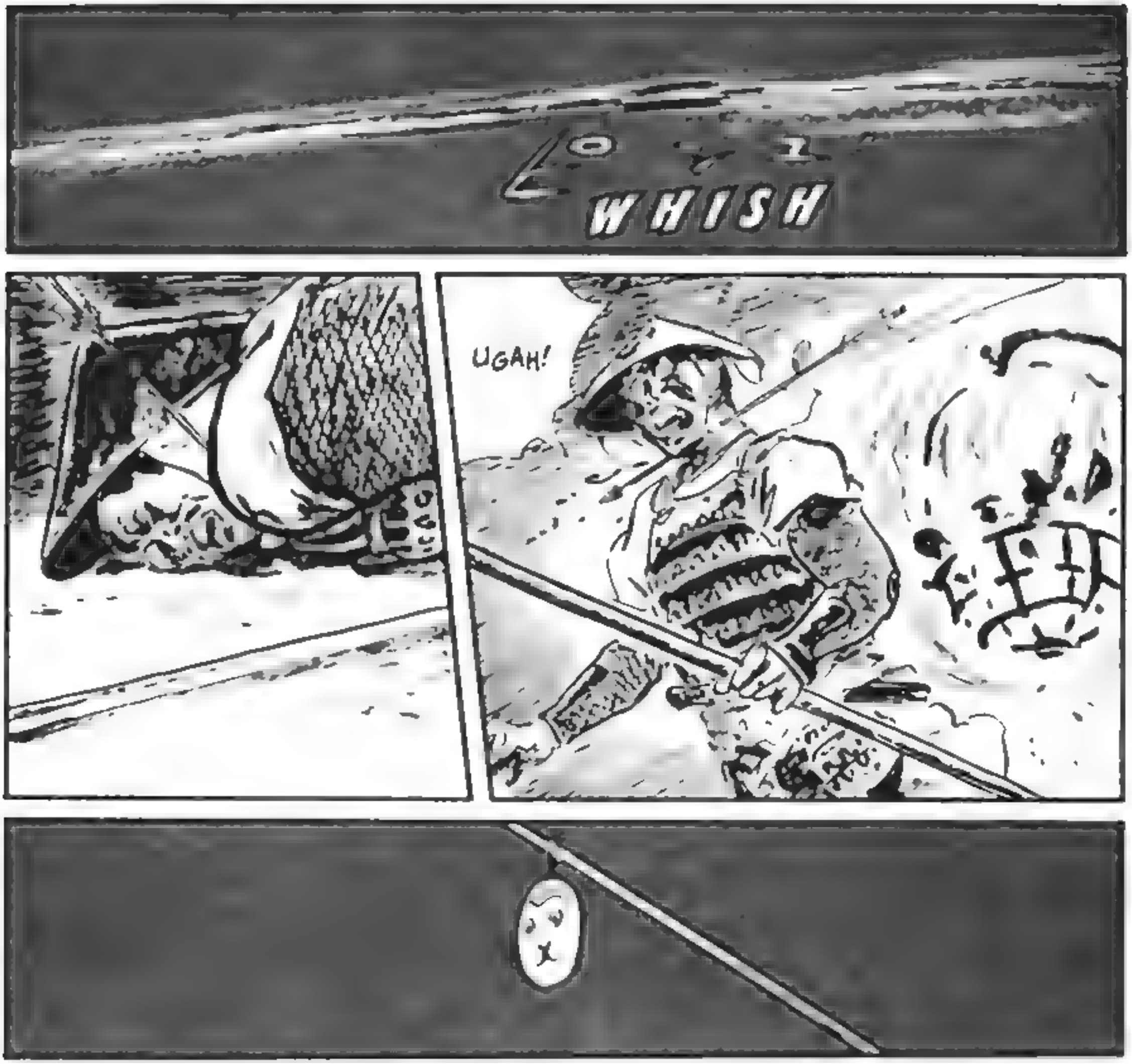
DEATH ALWAYS COMES...

MEN ARE SAD CREATURES. KNOWING WE WILL ALL DIE, WHY DO WE GO TO WAR AND HASTEN OUR OWN DEATHS?

O... ONII-SAMA!

AHH!!

THAT NIGHT, ON JUNE 13TH, SEVENTH YEAR OF TENSHŌ (1579 A.D.), THE PEERLESS STRATEGIST TAKENAKA HANBEI SHIGEHARU PASSED AWAY. HE DIED AT THE AGE OF THIRTY-FIVE.


WHISH
UGAH!

THE MONKEY MASK.

HE WANTS TO SETTLE THINGS FOR GOOD.

COME SO AS TO LEAVE.

KYORAI

去来

US, TOO.

I WILL COME WITH YOU.

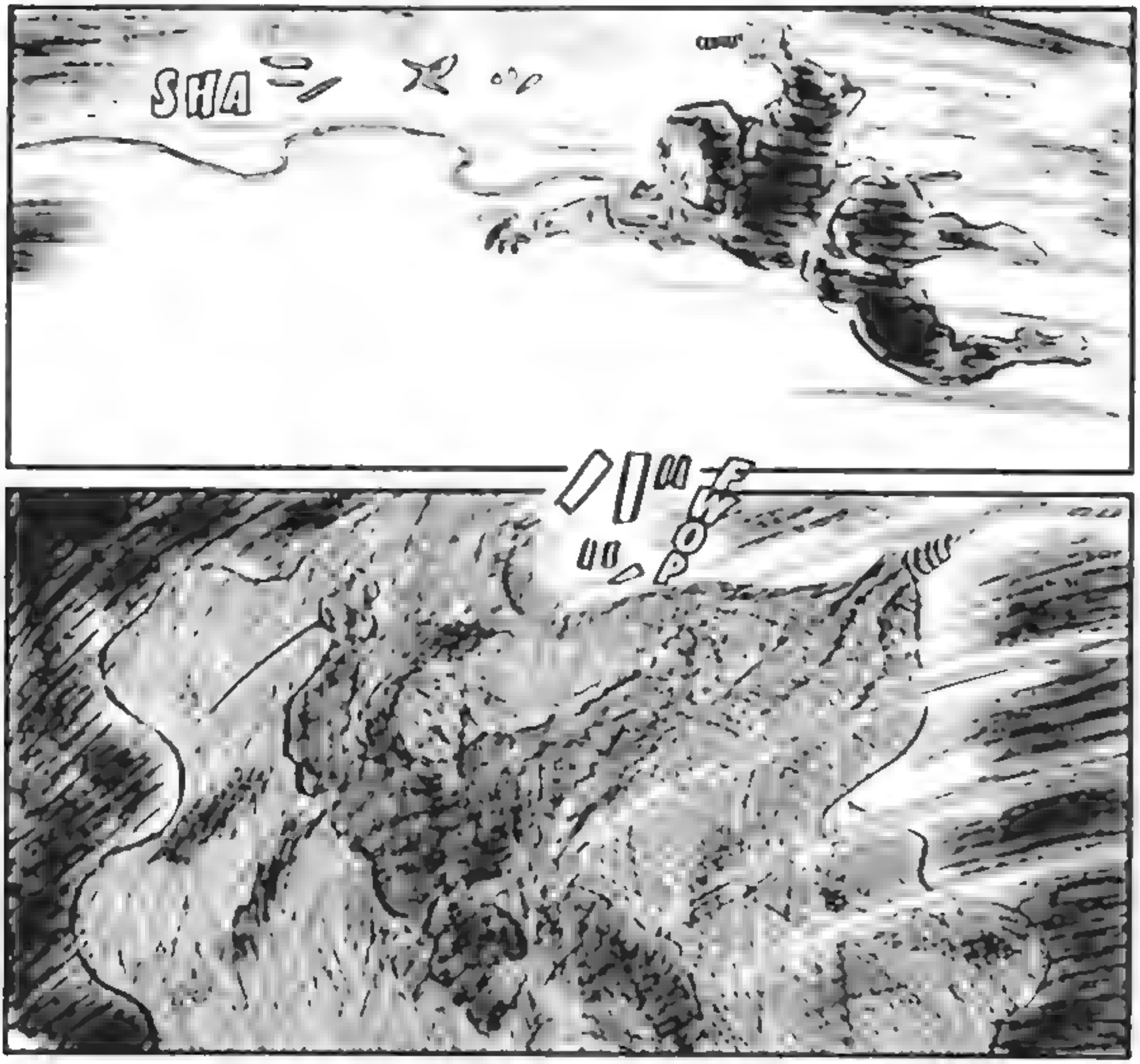
THE WORDPLAY IS IN "KYO (LEAVE)" AND "SARU (LEAVE)." "SARU" WRITTEN IN ANOTHER KANJI MEANS MONKEY. HE PROBABLY WANTS A DUEL WITH ME.

I'D BETTER FINISH HIM NOW.

IF HE ISN'T STOPPED, HE WILL TAKE REVENGE ON TOKUGAWA.

DO YOU MEAN TO GO ALONE?

UNLESS I GO BY MYSELF, HE'LL STAY HIDDEN.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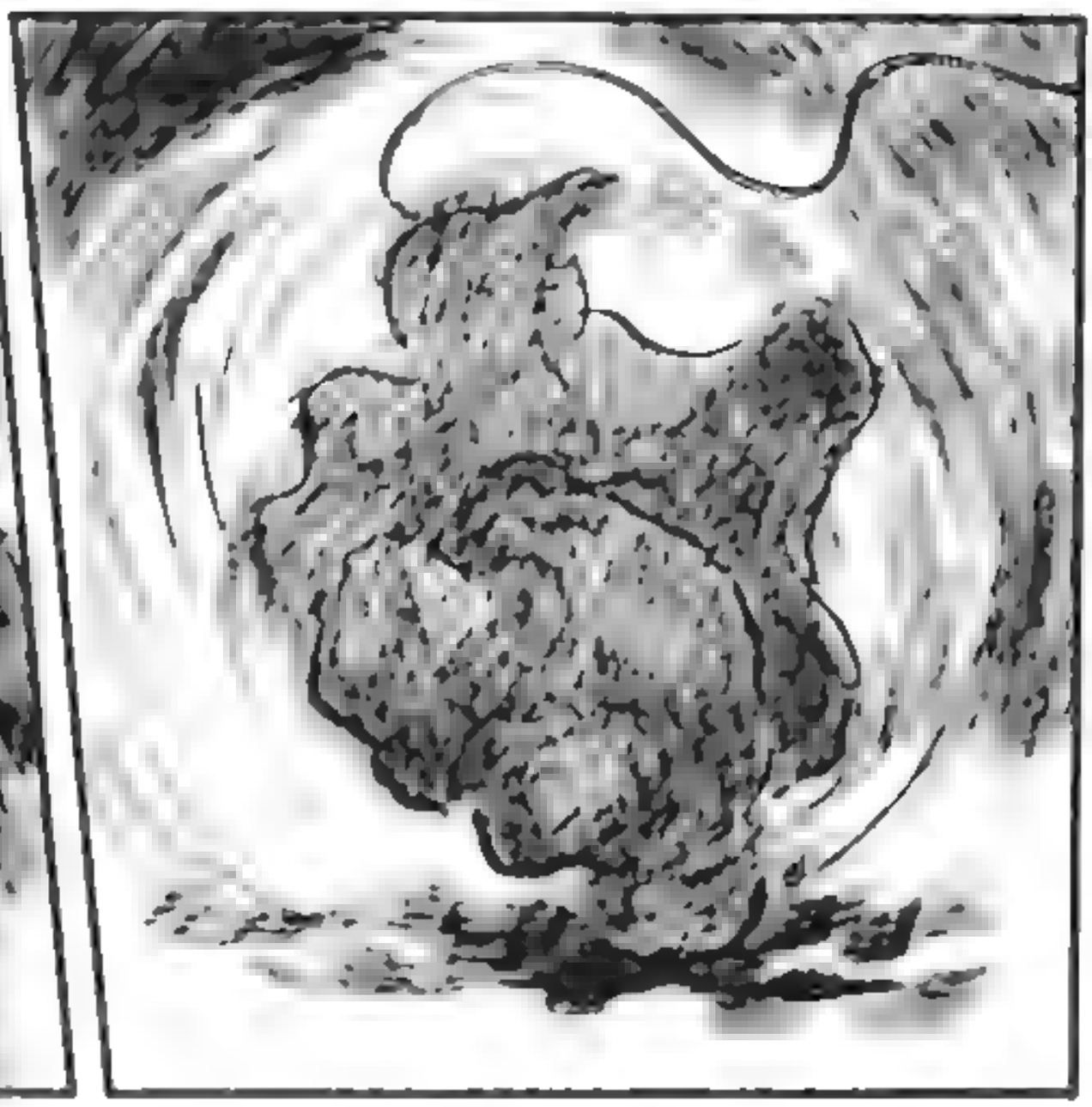
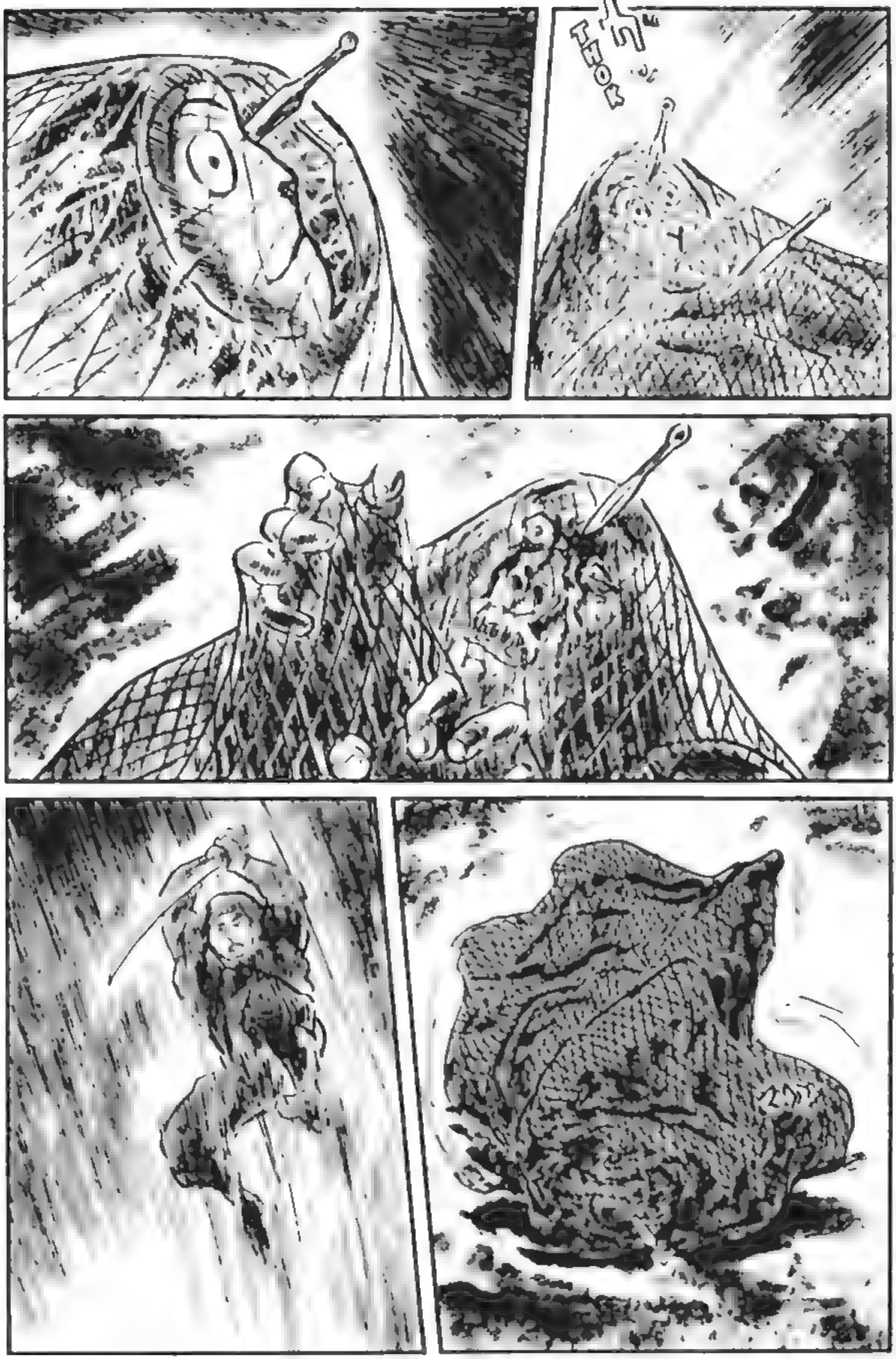



HEOL

LIGHT-WEIGHT... AND THIN... NEVER SAW ANYTHING LIKE IT BEFORE.

M...METAL NET...HOW CLEVER...

...A GUN... OR A METAL NET...LIKE THIS...

AS A *SUPPA*... MY PRIDE... WON'T ALLOW ME...TO USE...

I...SEE... EVERYTHING... FROM OVERSEAS...

IT'S A NEW DEVICE FROM ABROAD.

HANZŌ, IT'S A NEW ERA... EH?

BUT...YOU AND NOBUNAGA BOTH... USE THEM FREELY. THAT MAKES IT... IMPOSSIBLE...TO CALL YOU A COWARD...

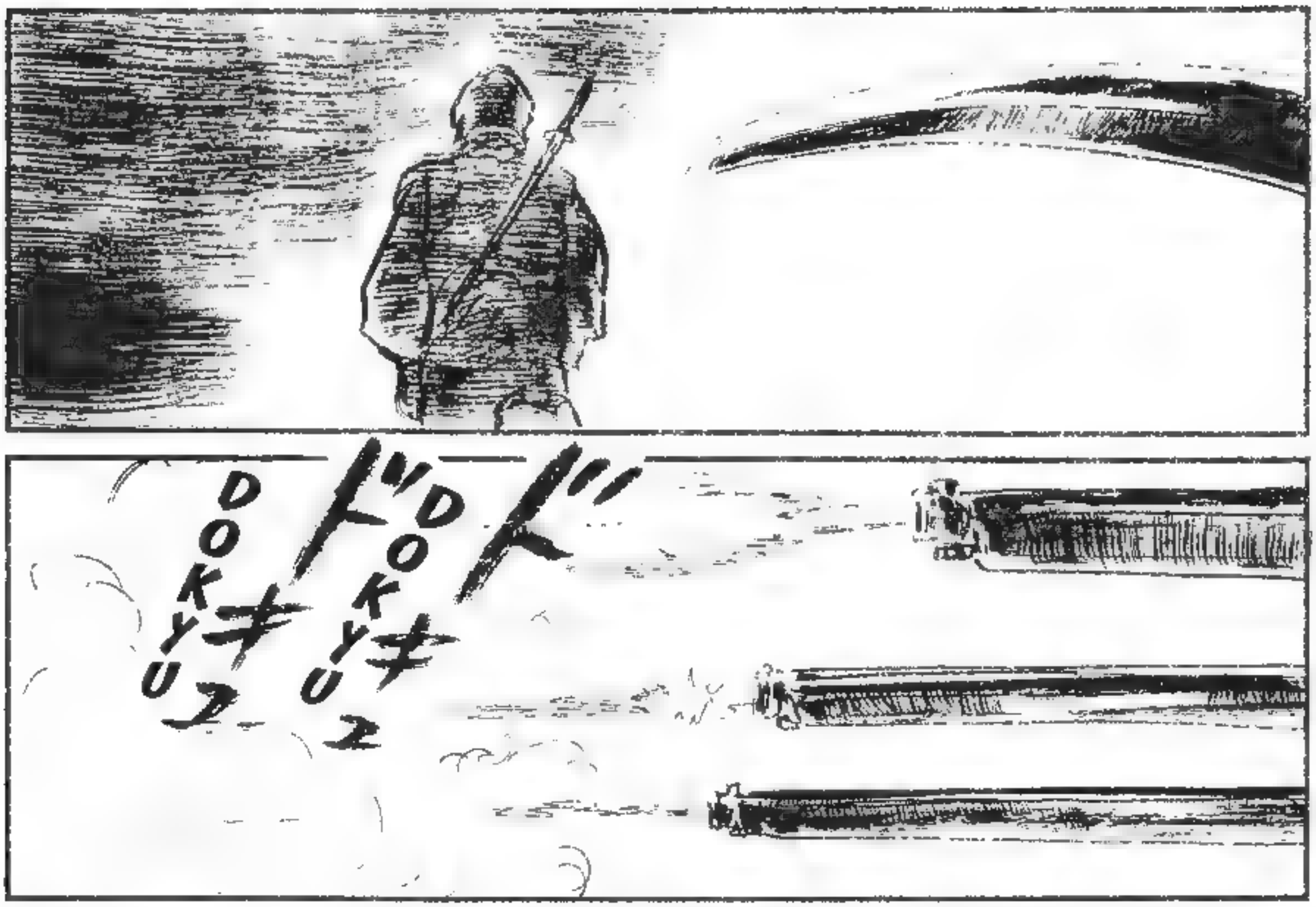
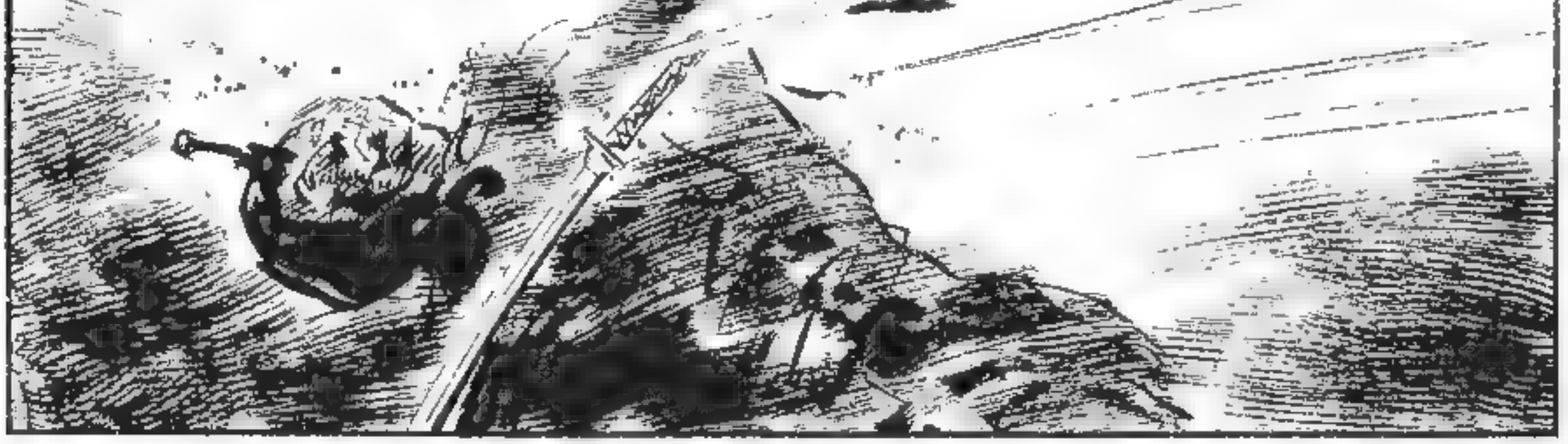
HOW DID YOU KNOW WHERE I WAS HIDING?

WHA... WHAT THE HELL?

GAK!

FARAWAY THINGS SEEM...AS IF THEY'RE IN MY HAND...

IT TOO IS FROM OVER-SEAS.


OKAY
OKAY


AND...WITH WHAT I HATE...

A... FOLLOW-UP... PLAN.

HOW... WELL... PRE-PARED.

WITH GUNS...

THE ERA OF LONE *SUPPA* IS OVER.

I
CANNOT
SEE!

YOU ARE MY HANDS AND LEGS. PLEASE, I BEG YOU, HANZŌ!
THEN WHO CAN?!

I MUST REFUSE.

I...

PLEASE TAKE THIS TASK.

I CANNOT DO IT!

ARE YOU DISOBEYING YOUR MASTER'S ORDER?!

DAMN YOU!!

IT MAY SOUND AS IF I'M USING SOPHISTRY, BUT IF I DO THIS, IT'S AS IF YOU'RE THE ONE WHO'S WET YOUR HANDS IN THIS GRIEVOUS BLOOD!

MILORD, YOU JUST SAID I AM YOUR HANDS AND LEGS.

I'VE WET MY HANDS REGARDLESS OF WHO DOES IT. THERE'S NO DIFFERENCE, NO MATTER WHO ACCEPTS THE JOB.

YOU FOOL! I AM THE ONE GIVING THE ORDERS.

TUNK

I... JUST CAN'T.

PLEASE UNDER-STAND.

LISTEN, HANZŌ. I CAN'T TAKE TOKUGAWA AS A WHOLE AND WEIGH IT AGAINST THE LIVES OF THOSE TWO.

IF I CAN'T HAVE YOU DO WHAT I CAN'T DO MYSELF, THEN WHO... WHO CAN I ASK?!

IF SO...I HAVE TO DO IT. I CAN'T ASK MY VASSALS TO THROW AWAY WHAT MAKES THEM HUMAN TO CARRY OUT THIS TASK.

BUT IT MUST BE DONE.

I CAN'T DO IT EITHER... NO HUMAN CAN DO THIS.

THAT'S WHY I'M PLEADING WITH YOU. CAN'T YOU UNDERSTAND HOW PAINFUL THIS IS?

YOU ARE LIKE MY OTHER SELF.

HA...?!

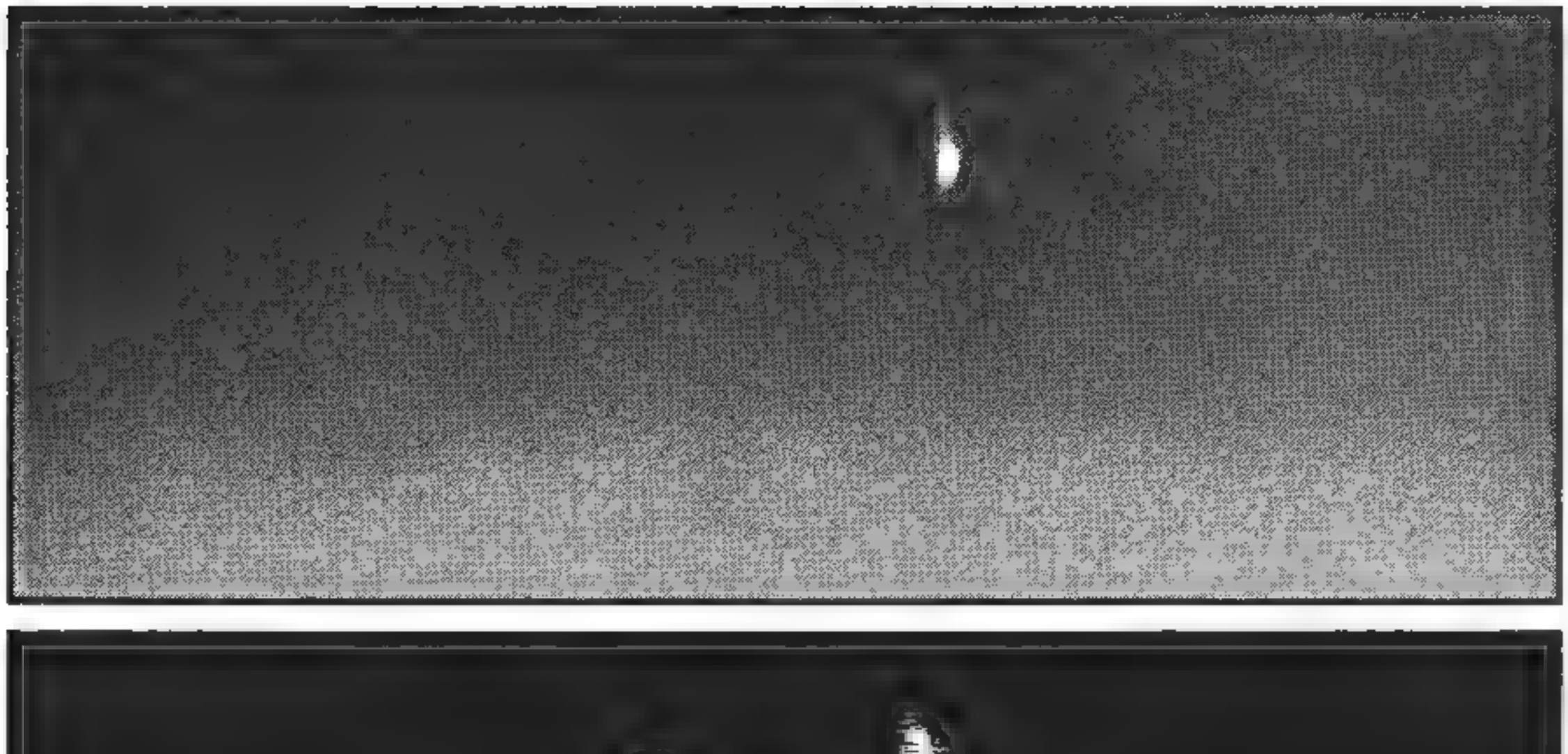
I BEG YOUR PARDON, SIR, BUT I ONLY THOUGHT OF HOW IT WOULD APPEAR TO THOSE BEING KILLED.

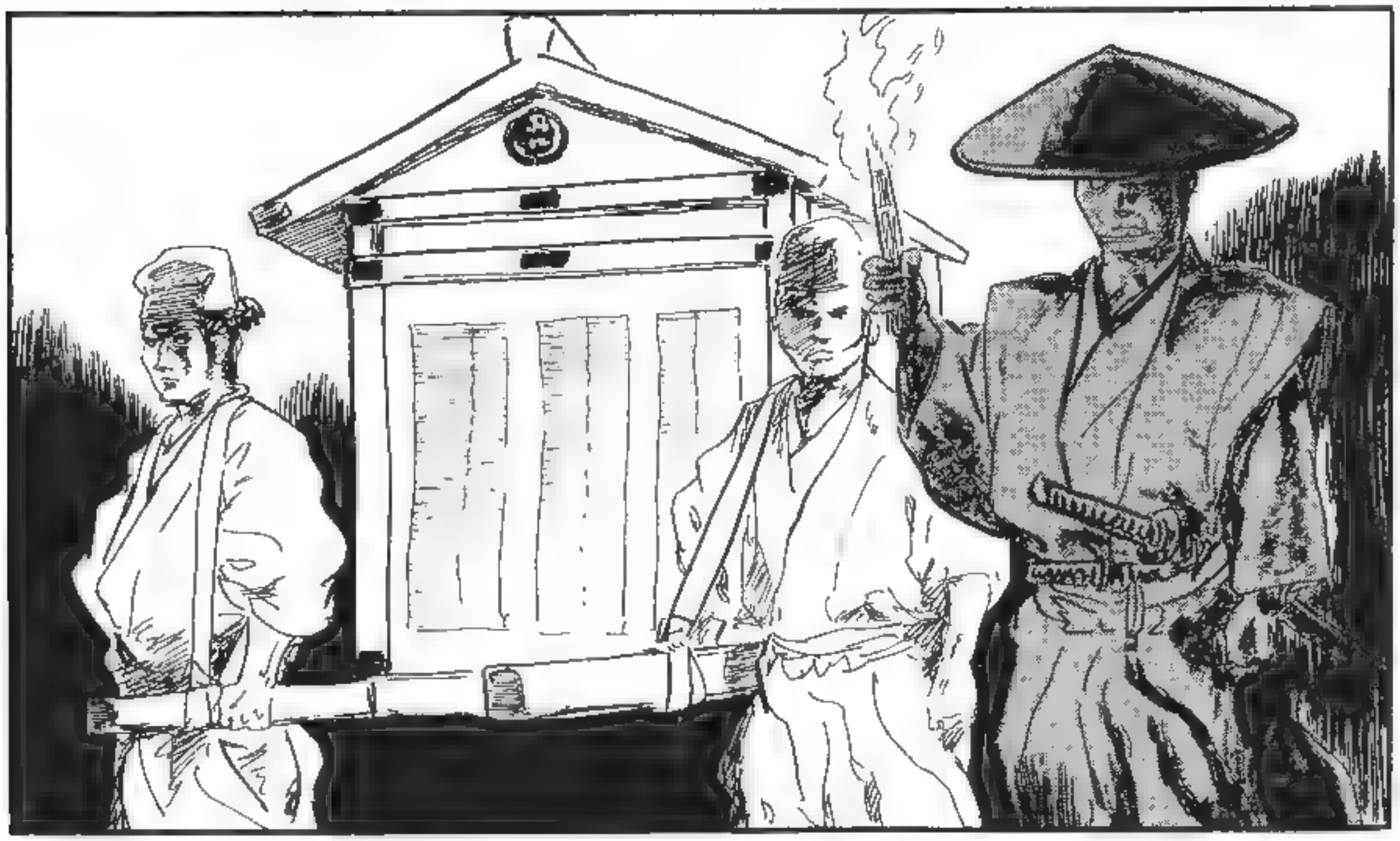
THE DEPTH OF THEIR SHOCK AND SORROW WILL BE UNFATHOMABLE. NO DOUBT, THEY WON'T BE ABLE TO REST IN PEACE.

IF I MURDER THEM, MILORD, THEY WILL BELIEVE IT'S NO ONE BUT YOU WHO'S BROUGHT THEIR DEATH.

THUS I THINK IT'S BETTER THAT YOU ORDER SOMEONE UNFAMILIAR, SOMEONE THEY HARDLY HAVE A RELATIONSHIP WITH...

YES, SIR
HMMM WITHOUT GIVING EXPLANATIONS SUDDENLY, OUT OF THE BLUE





WE ARE ABOUT TO REACH TOMI-TSUKA.

WHERE ARE WE NOW?

LET ME OUT. I NEED TO PEE.

YES, MILADY.

NOBUYASU IS MOVING TO HORIE, AND HE'S MEETING ME AT TOMITSUKA, RIGHT?

?!

ALL THE WOMEN ARE GONE TOO.

HUH?! THE MEN WHO WERE CARRYING THE PALANQUIN... WHERE DID THEY GO?

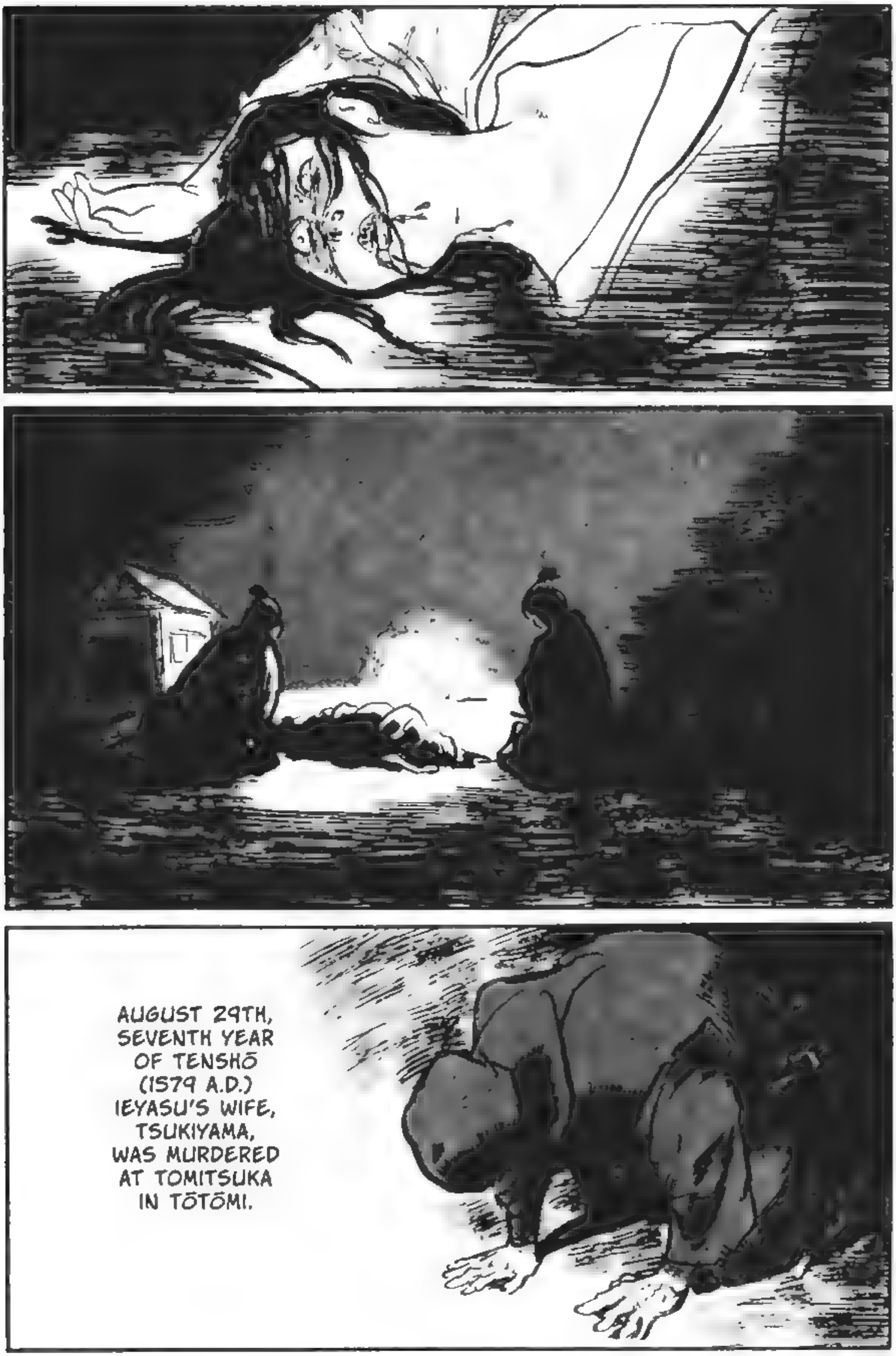
AND I AM NONAKA HACHI-RŌZA.

I AM OKAMOTO HEIBEI.

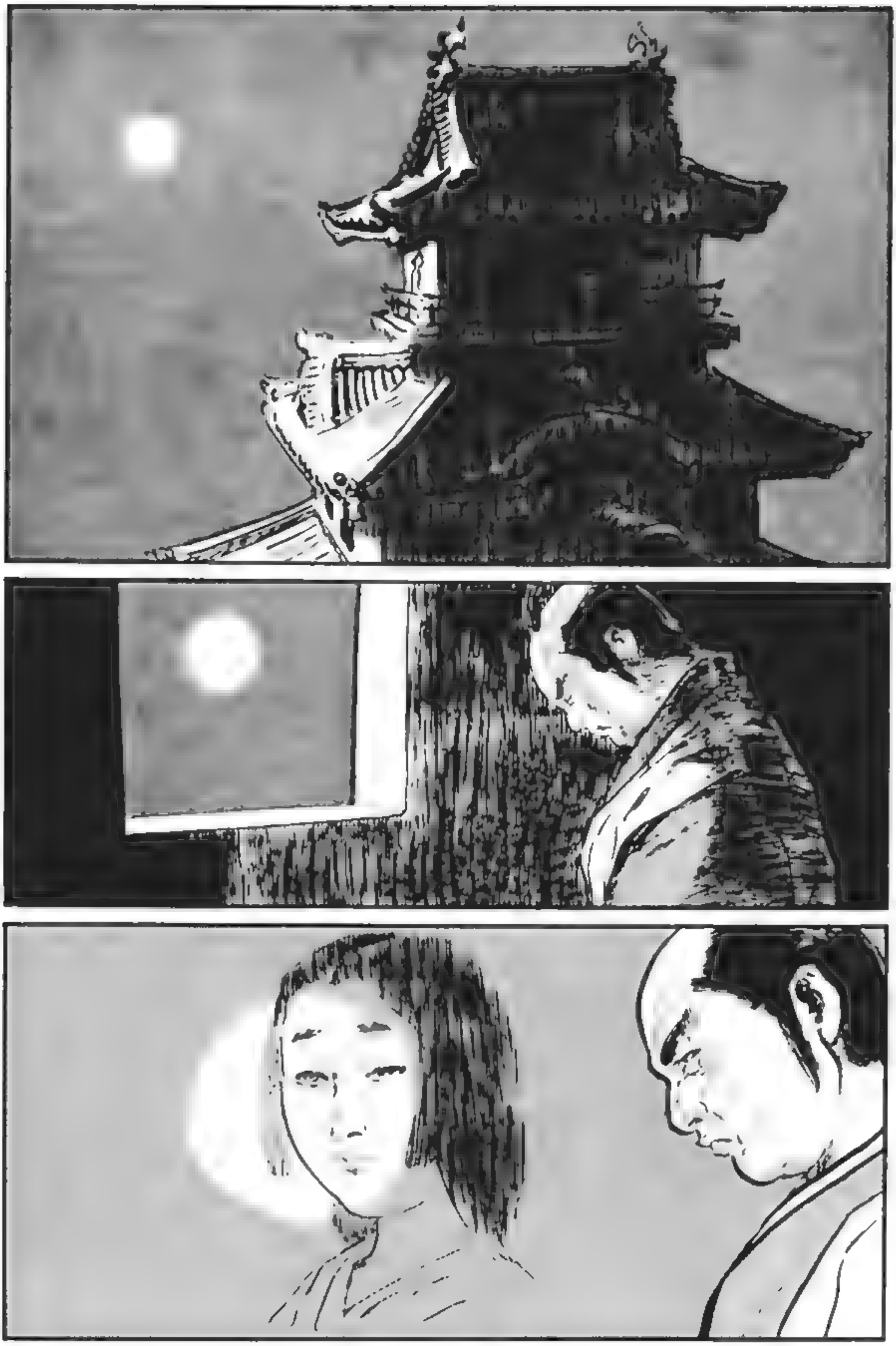
YOU ARE TADA-TSUGU'S MEN.

CHUFF
CHUFF
AAAAAA

WHY...?
TADA-TSUGU'S... MEN...?



AUGUST 29TH,
SEVENTH YEAR
OF TENSHŌ
(1579 A.D.)
IEYASU'S WIFE,
TSUKIYAMA,
WAS MURDERED
AT TOMITSUKA
IN TŌTŌMI.



UR...

AND IT WAS AN ORDER FROM A VERY POWERFUL MAN OF INFLUENCE... BUT STILL... I...I...

IT MAY BE A TIME OF WARRING STATES...

I KILLED MY WIFE...

EVEN THOUGH... I AM THE MASTER OF MY OWN LAND.

WHAT ON EARTH HAS HAP-PENED?

JUST POUR ME MORE.

NO!

SHINOBI MAY DRINK, BUT NEVER GET DRUNK. NEVER. BUT YOU ARE TRYING TO.

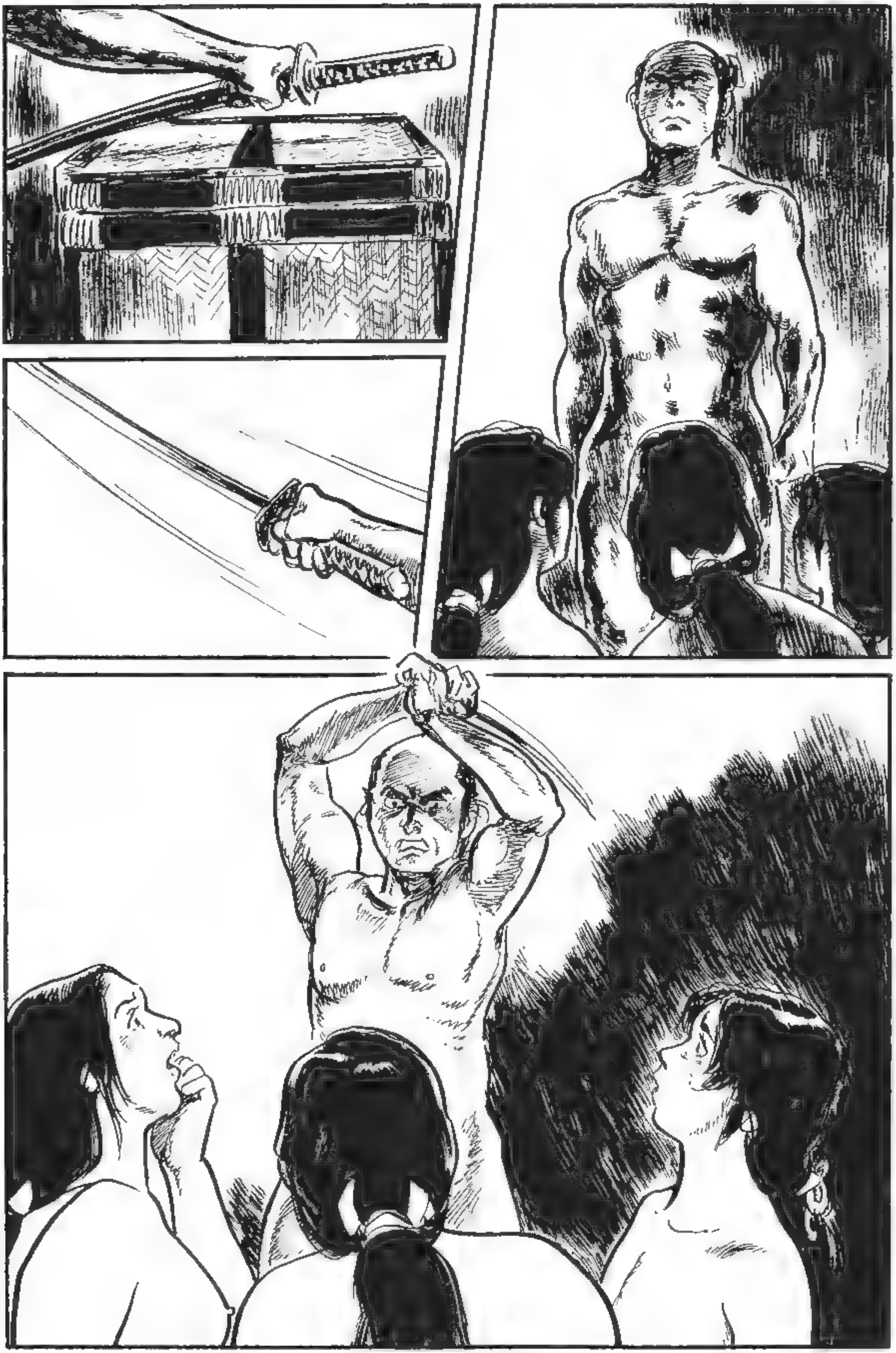
SO WE SUSPECT SOMETHING VERY BAD HAS HAPPENED. PLEASE TELL US ABOUT IT.

IT IS BEHAVIOR UNWORTHY OF *SHINOBI*.

URK...

COME!!

AHHH
AHHH
AHHH
AHHH
AHHH
AHHH
AHHH
AHHH
AHHH
AHHH
AHHH
AHHH
AHHH
AHHH
AHHH
AHHH



I JUST CAN'T DO IT.

I CAN'T KILL THOSE I LOVE MOST IN THIS WORLD.

I CAN'T.

NOBUNAGA-*SAMA* WISHED...

...TSUKIYAMA-*SAMA* AND NOBUYASU-*SAMA* DEAD.

TADATSUGU-*SAMA* WAS SUMMONED BY NOBUNAGA-*SAMA*, AND RETURNED WITH NOBUNAGA-*SAMA*'S WISHES.

IT WAS SIX DAYS AGO.

...

...

MILORD MAY NOT BE FOND OF TSUKIYAMA-*SAMA*... NOR OF NOBUYASU-*SAMA* ANYMORE. HE MAY HAVE ALL SORTS OF FEELINGS TOWARDS THEM...

ALREADY, ON THE NIGHT OF THE 29TH, TSUKIYAMA-*SAMA*'S LIFE ENDED IN TOMITSUKA.

NO, I SHOULD NOT THINK OF IT ANY-MORE.

WHAT WOULD I DO IF I WERE IN THAT POSITION ...?

BUT STILL, HOW PAINFUL IT MUST BE TO KILL SOMEONE WITH HIS OWN HANDS, SOMEONE HE LOVED BEFORE.

Y... YES.

HANZŌ, PLEASE ASSIST NOBU-YASU WHEN HE PERFORMS *SEPPUKU*.

A DEMON... DID HE?

BE A DEMON, HE SAID.

ANY MESSAGE FROM MY FATHER?

HATTORI.

I HAVE NOTHING TO SAY NOW.

THAT'S WHY, NOBUYASU-*SAMA*, HE WANTS IT FOR YOU, TOO...

I BELIEVE YOUR FATHER TURNED HIS HEART INTO A DEMON.

HATTORI! BEHEAD ME! NOW!

SHLUCK

HATTORI-DONO!

UR...

I... I CAN'T...

URK...

B... BEHEAD ME, HATTORI!!

HATTORI!! ARE YOU GOING TO WAIT UNTIL MY BLADE CROSSES MY BELLY?!

SLURRCH

SLURRCH

URK...

HA... HAT-TORI !!

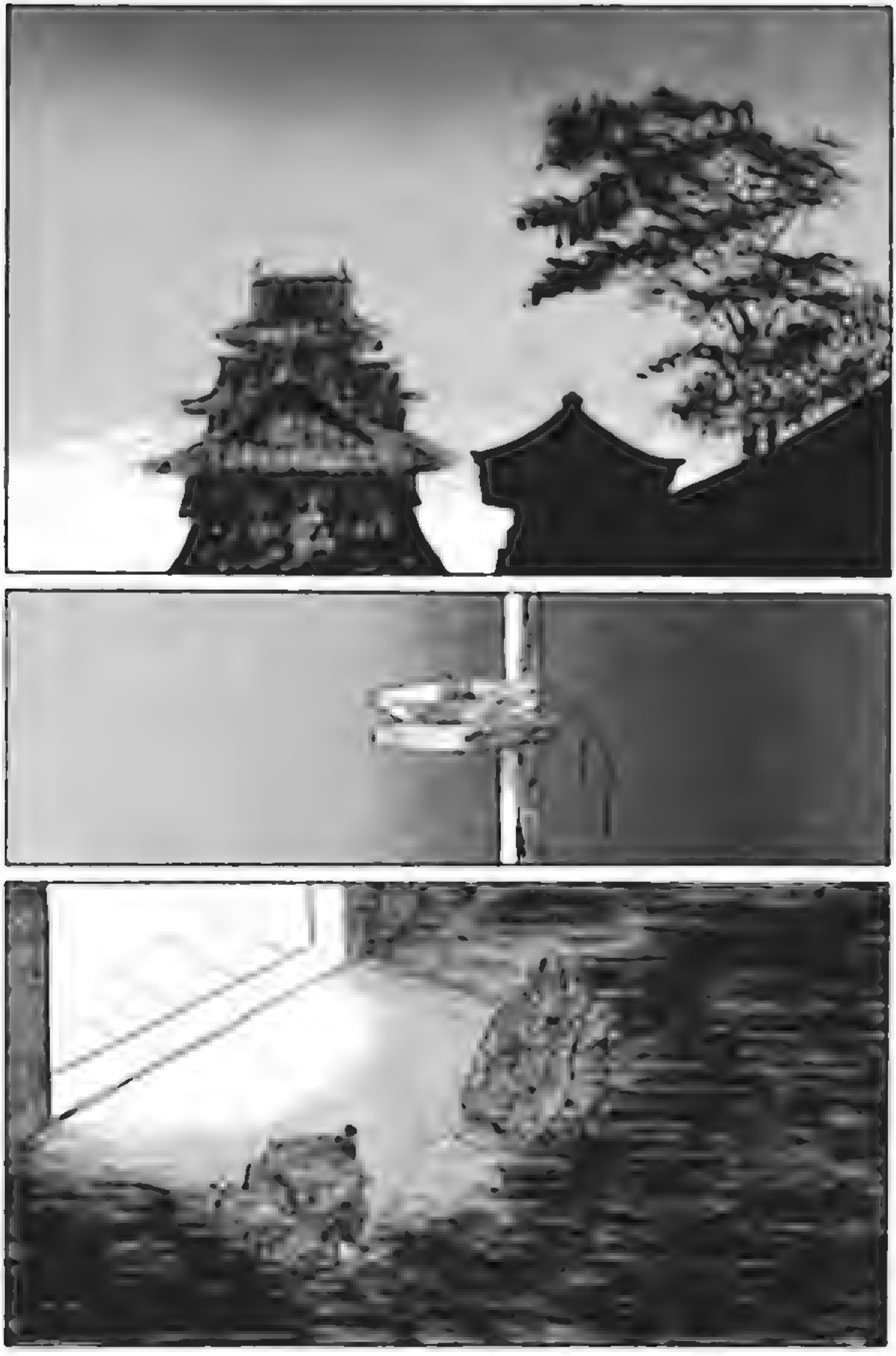
HA HA HA HA

...SHALL BEHEAD YOU, SIR!

IN PLACE OF HATTORI-*DONO*, I, AMA-KATA SANJŌ...

HA HA

HA
HA
HA
HA
HA



SO HE LAUGHED.

YOU COULDN'T DO IT BECAUSE YOU THOUGHT HE WAS MY SON? OR WAS IT BECAUSE YOU THOUGHT HIS SOUL WOULD FIND PEACE IF YOU DIDN'T?

MAYBE HE SAW MY AFFECTION IN YOUR HESITATION.

IF YOU ASSISTED NOBUYASU, HE WOULD'VE THOUGHT IT WAS MY HANDS THAT DID IT.

WAS I TO BEHEAD NOBUYASU-*SAMA*, I WONDERED, OR WAS I TO THINK OF HIM AS SOMEONE ELSE.

WHEN I FACED THE TASK OF BEHEADING HIM... I FROZE.

HE MUST'VE LAUGHED BECAUSE OF IT.

IT WAS LIKE BEING TAKEN BY SURPRISE. I KNEW I MUST DO IT WITH THE WISH THAT HE'D REST IN PEACE, AND THAT I MUST NOT LIE TO MYSELF IN ANY WAY. OTHERWISE, I'D BE HOLDING HIM IN CONTEMPT.

I COULD NOT MAKE UP MY MIND, AND I PANICKED.

WERE YOU PRAYING FOR UJIZANE'S SON TO REST IN PEACE?

BUT NOW I KNOW. HE WAS NOBUYASU. HE WAS MY SON.

I TOO DOUBTED, AND COULDN'T DECIDE.

THAT IS, HE MAY HAVE DEMANDED THE DEATH OF BOTH TSUKIYAMA AND NOBUYASU TO ROOT OUT IMAGAWA'S BLOOD.

NOBUNAGA-*SAMA* MAY HAVE HAD THE SAME THOUGHT.

I AM RELIEVED, SIR.

I HOLD HIM DEAR. I'M FOND OF HIM EVEN AFTER HIS DEATH. IT MUST MEAN THAT MY BLOOD FLOWED INSIDE HIM.

I AM GLAD YOU DIDN'T ASSIST HIM.

AT TIMES, HE MUST'VE SUSPECTED I WASN'T HIS FATHER. NO, HE PROBABLY DOUBTED IT UNTIL NEARLY THE VERY END.

IT MUST'VE BOTHERED HIM DEEPLY AS WELL.

BECAUSE YOU DIDN'T ASSIST HIM, HE WAS ABLE TO DIE AS NOBUYASU.

YOU WERE THE ONE WHO HELPED HIM OVERTURN HIS SUSPICION, HANZŌ.

YOU ALWAYS WALK BEFORE ME.

?!

HANZŌ *NO MON.*

THUS, I ALWAYS HAVE A GATE BEFORE ME. IT'S A SAFE GATE CALLED HANZŌ-*MON*.

YOU CLEAR MY PATH AND LEAD ME TO SAFETY.

THE GATE I ENTER AND EXIT.

YOU ARE NOT A *SHINOBI*, BUT A GATE.

NOBUYASU DIED AT THE AGE OF TWENTY-ONE.

AND YOU ARE THIRTY-SEVEN.
I'M THIRTY-EIGHT, HANZŌ.

WE STILL HAVE A LONG WAY TO GO. WE MUST LIVE LONG FOR THEIR SAKE, TOO.

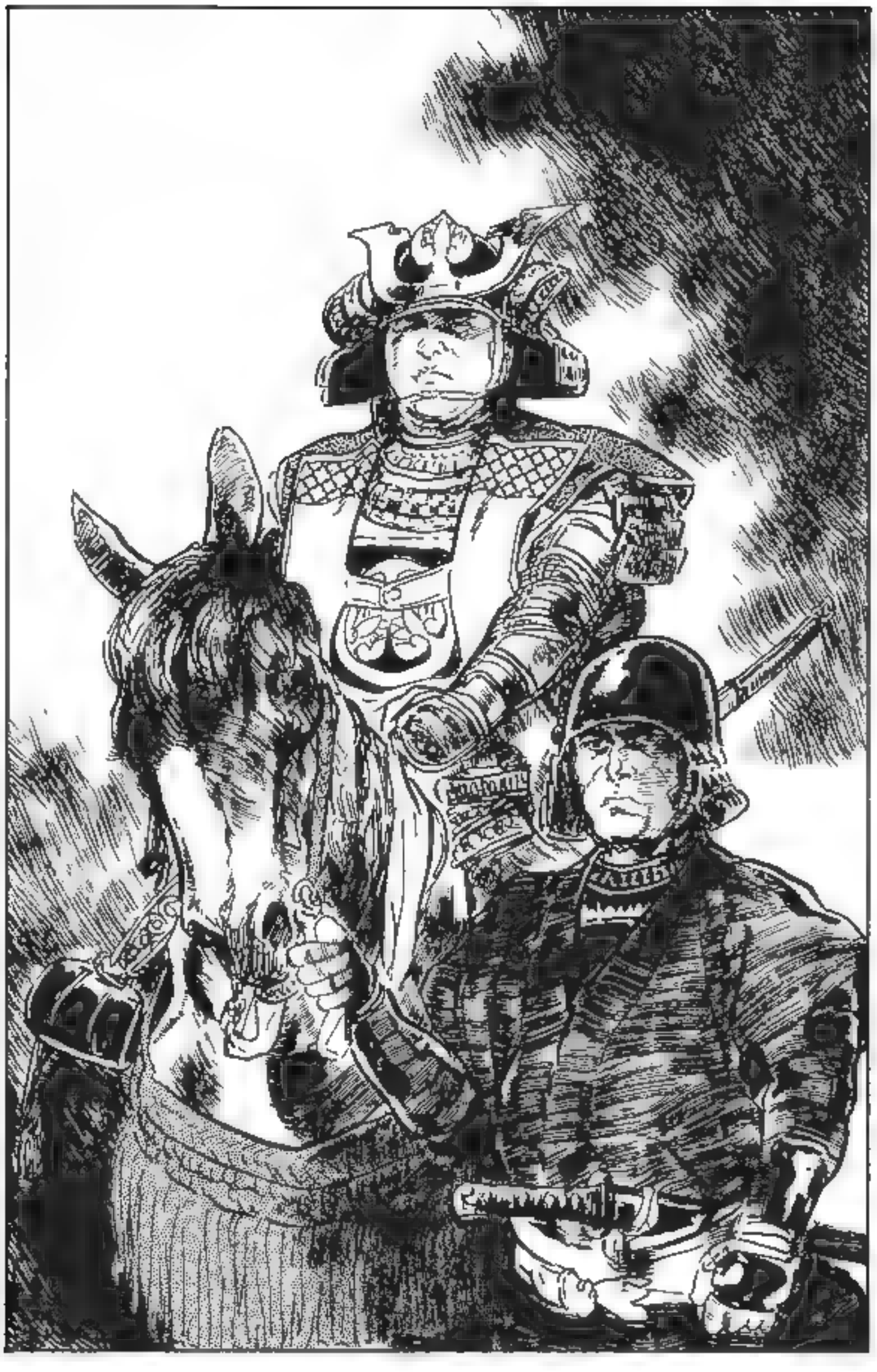
MY WIFE!!

NOBUYASU!

ЗОВИ ЛЮДЕЙ
ОХРАНА!
ЧТО?!

Chapter One Half a Step Forward

No. 2: One Who Rules The Dark



IEYASU VISITED AZUCHI AND OFFERED HORSES TO NOBUNAGA.

FETCH ME YOSHI-TAKA.

SIR!

IEYASU-*DONO*, LET ME INTRODUCE YOU TO AN INTERESTING MAN.

HE IS FAMOUS AS THE CAPTAIN OF OUR ISE NAVY.

THIS IS KUKI YOSHITAKA, ODA'S NAVAL COMMANDER. I'M SURE YOU'VE HEARD OF HIM.

THIS IS TOKUGAWA IEYASU-*DONO*. WHY DON'T YOU LET HIM OFFER YOU SOMETHING TO DRINK.

SAME HERE.

I AM KUKI YOSHITAKA. PLEASED TO MEET YOU.

THANK YOU.

YOU TRAVEL WITH SO FEW MEN. DON'T YOU GET NERVOUS?

OR ARE YOU TRYING TO CURRY FAVOR WITH MILORD BY ACTING AS IF YOU'RE AT EASE AND NOT WORRIED EVEN WHEN YOU ARE ALONE INSIDE ODA TERRITORIES?

IEYASU-*SAMA*, DID YOU COME TO AZUCHI ALONE?

KUKI-*DONO*, I HEAR YOU DESTROYED MŌRI'S NAVY AT THE KIZUGAWA RIVER.

ARE YOU TRYING TO SHOW HOW SECURE YOU FEEL ABOUT ODA, SECURE ENOUGH TO COME ALONE?

OUR SHIPS WERE MUCH BIGGER. THAT'S ALL.

HONGANJI TEMPLE WON'T BE ABLE TO CAUSE MUCH TROUBLE NOW. CONGRATULA-TIONS.

DUE TO YOUR SKILL ON THE WATER, ISHIYAMA IS NOW ISOLATED. I HEAR THEY CAN'T EVEN GET ENOUGH PROVISIONS.

I THOUGHT WE MIGHT AS WELL GO THREE TIMES LARGER. THAT WAY, OUR VICTORY WOULD BE CERTAIN. AND, YOU KNOW, WE BUILT SIX OF THEM.

AND BUILDING LARGER SHIPS WAS MILORD'S ORDER, TOO. MŌRI'S NAVY BEAT US IN THE PAST, SO HE TOLD US TO BUILD SHIPS TWICE AS BIG TO ENSURE WE WOULDN'T LOSE THIS TIME.

HA HA HA HA HA. HA HA HA HA.

HA HA HA HA.

SURE ENOUGH, WE FLABBERGASTED MŌRI'S NAVY. WE WON EVEN BEFORE THE BATTLE BEGAN.

AFTER YOU SENT YOUR WIFE AND SON TO THEIR GRAVES, YOU CAME TO OFFER HORSES TO MILORD WITH HARDLY ANYONE ACCOMPANYING YOU.

BUT PLEASE DON'T CHANGE THE SUBJECT, IEYASU-*DONO*.

IF YOU WERE HIS VASSAL, THAT WOULD BE ONE THING. BUT ALL YOU HAVE IS AN ALLIANCE. I'M SIMPLY IMPRESSED AT HOW FAR YOU ARE WILLING TO GO. THAT'S WHY I HAD TO VOICE MY THOUGHTS.

THAT'S ENOUGH, YOSHI-TAKA!

WHAT IF I TRIED?

I TOO HAVE AMBITION. IT'S NOT LIKE I WOULDN'T DREAM OF KILLING YOU, HERE AND NOW, AND TAKING OVER MIKAWA.

WHAT?

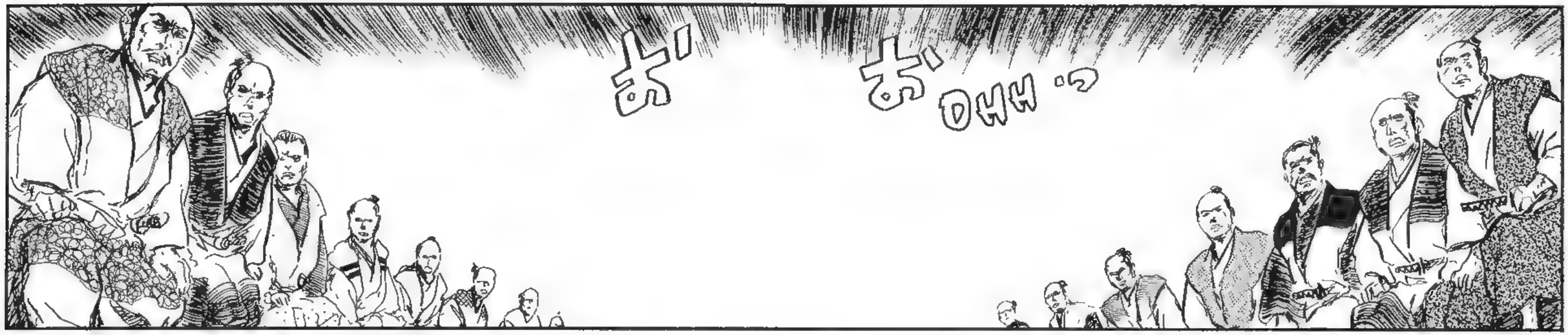
IF YOU WANT, WHY DON'T YOU TRY IT NOW?

I'LL DEAL WITH IT WHEN IT HAPPENS.

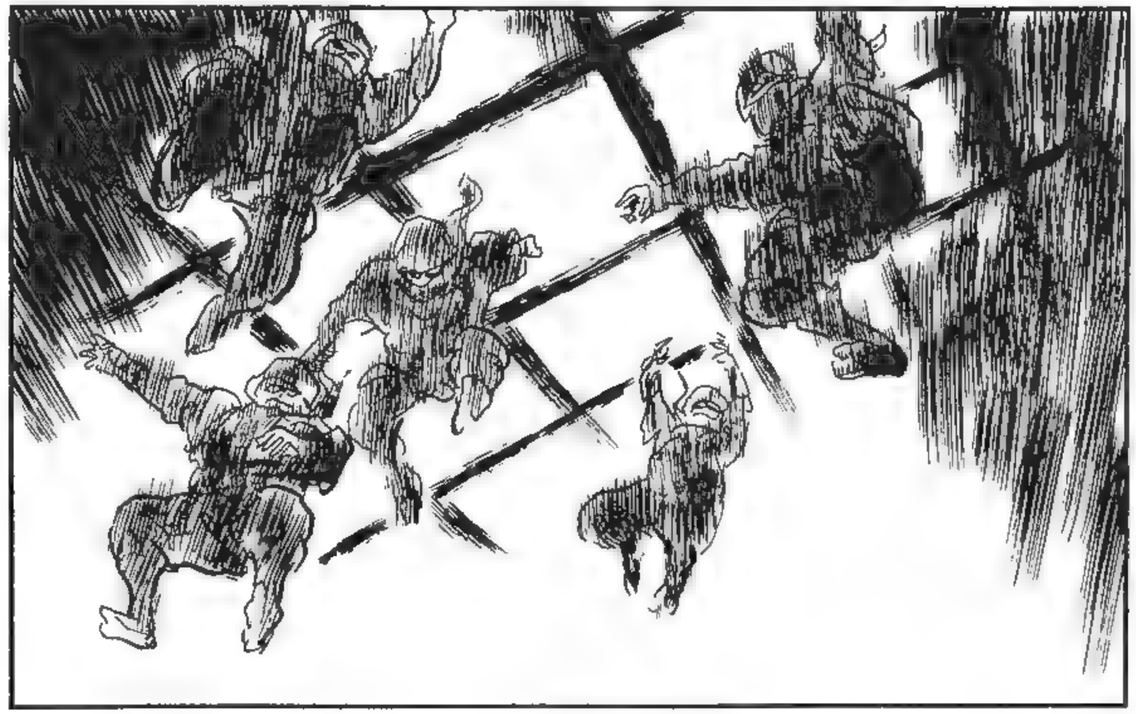
YES, SIR.

HA HA HA HA. HOW FUN! YOSHITAKA, TRY IT!

AH!



WHAT'RE YOU DOING?!
GUARDS! GUARDS!!
WHEN... WHEN DID THE WOMEN...



THAT'S WHY, PARTLY FOR YOUR ENTERTAINMENT, I'VE ORGANIZED AN ACT TO SHOW YOU *IGAMONO*. SHOULD ANYTHING HAPPEN, THEY WILL BE ABLE TO HELP YOU.

NOBUNAGA-*SAMA*, YOU OWN GREAT FLEETS AND THOUSANDS OF GUNS. FACED WITH THAT, NO ONE CAN DEFY YOU. HOWEVER, EVEN YOU WILL FIND IT DIFFICULT TO RULE THE DARK.

MILORD IS ALREADY PROTECTED BY ME. I AM ITOMARU.

THERE'S NO NEED!

MOU SUGU

ALONE, ITOMARU-*DONO*, YOU WON'T BE ABLE TO PROTECT NOBUNAGA-*SAMA*.
I AM HATTORI HANZŌ MASANARI, THE BEST OF IGA.

BECAUSE I KNEW NOTHING WOULD GO WRONG, AND NOTHING CAN GO WRONG.

YOU DIDN'T NOTICE THAT WE SWITCHED YOUR WOMEN WITH OURS, AND YOU JUST WATCHED IN SILENCE WHEN OUR MEN SURROUNDED NOBUNAGA-*SAMA*. HOW CAN YOU PROTECT HIM?

INDEED.

ARE YOU TRYING TO SAY YOU KNOW EVERYTHING?

THAT'S WHY KUKI-*SAMA* DIRECTED THE CONVERSATION THE WAY HE DID, TO SET THE STAGE FOR YOUR *SHINOBI* TO COME OUT.

KUKI-*SAMA* AND IEYASU-*SAMA* ARE IN COLLUSION.

IT IS IGNOBLE TO USE SOPHISTRY.

MEANWHILE, ANTICIPATING ALL OF THIS, IEYASU-*SAMA* BROUGHT ALONG HANZŌ-*DONO* AND THE OTHERS, WHICH PROVES THERE IS A STRONG UNDERSTANDING BETWEEN MILORD AND IEYASU-*SAMA*.

ON THE OTHER HAND, MILORD KNOWS THAT KUKI-*SAMA* AND IEYASU-*SAMA* ARE CLOSELY CONNECTED. THAT'S WHY HE BROUGHT THEM TOGETHER HERE.

ALL THREE PLAYED THEIR ROLES, AND AS A RESULT, THEY'VE FURTHER DEEPENED THEIR TRUST IN EACH OTHER.

BY BRINGING HANZŌ-*DONO* AND THE OTHER *SHINOBI*, IEYASU-*SAMA* DEMONSTRATED WHAT COULD HAPPEN. HE DIDN'T DO THIS TO DISPLAY HIS POWER. HE DID THIS BECAUSE HE TRULY CARES ABOUT MILORD'S SAFETY.

MILORD MAY OWN A GREAT FLEET AND THOUSANDS OF MUSKETS, BUT HE CANNOT RULE THE DARK. THUS, IEYASU-*SAMA* CAME TO OFFER HIS HONEST ADVICE REGARDING THE BENEFIT OF HAVING *SHINOBI* SUCH AS YOURSELF, HANZŌ-*DONO*.

EVEN THOUGH IEYASU-*SAMA* WAS FORCED TO KILL HIS WIFE AND SON, HE HAS NO HIDDEN AGENDA.

GIVEN ALL THAT, THERE WAS NO NEED FOR ME HERE.

FURTHERMORE, UPON LEARNING IEYASU-*SAMA'S* INTENT, MILORD SUMMONED KUKI-*SAMA*, AND BY DOING SO, MILORD HAS CLEARLY REVEALED HOW MUCH HE APPRECIATES IEYASU-*SAMA*.

FREE FROM ANY WORRIES, I WAS ENJOYING MY NAP IN THE OTHER CHAMBER. THAT IS ALL.

WHAT DANGER COULD THERE BE?

HA HA HA HA

HA HA HA HA

YES, SIR.

HANZŌ!

YOU FOOL! YOU DIDN'T NEED TO SAY ALL THAT.

EXCELLENT JOB. I DIDN'T NOTICE WHEN THE WOMEN SWITCHED. YOU MANAGED TO STAGE A VERY COMPLEX ARRANGEMENT WITHOUT REVEALING ANY SIGN OF IT.

IF I EVER FEEL NERVOUS ABOUT MY SAFETY, I SHALL COUNT ON YOU.

IF THE SOLDIER MISREADS THE GENERAL'S MIND, THE GENERAL WILL VANISH LIKE THE DEW ON A LEAF.

I BEG YOUR PARDON, SIR, BUT A SOLDIER IS NOT TO GAUGE WHAT A GENERAL HAS IN MIND, BUT TO ACT AS ORDERED.

...ITS APPALLING FATE.

THE FUTURE OF HIS LAND WILL BE DOOMED, AND YOU'LL WANT TO COVER YOUR EYES SO AS NOT TO SEE...

I'VE NEVER FATHOMED MY MASTER IEYASU'S MIND. NOT EVEN ONCE.

I AM HERE, AS MY MASTER ORDERED.

NOBUNAGA-*SAMA*, I WILL TAKE YOUR LIFE IF MY MASTER ORDERS IT.

UNLIKE ITOMARU-*DONO*, I WOULD NEVER BELIEVE THAT NOTHING COULD EVER HAPPEN AND TAKE A NAP. I HAVE NO SUCH ARROGANCE.

PERHAPS ITOMARU-*DONO* IS NO SOLDIER OF YOURS.

URM...

THAT SAID, WHAT ITOMARU STATED WAS HIS JUDGMENT, NOT HOW HE GAUGES MY MIND.

HM. THERE'S SOME TRUTH IN YOUR WORDS, HANZŌ.

ITOMARU, YOU WENT TOO FAR, IT SEEMS.

IGAMONO DISAPPROVED OF MY POSITION AND JUDGMENT. IT'S A DISHONOR.

THERE'S NO POINT IN ARGUING!

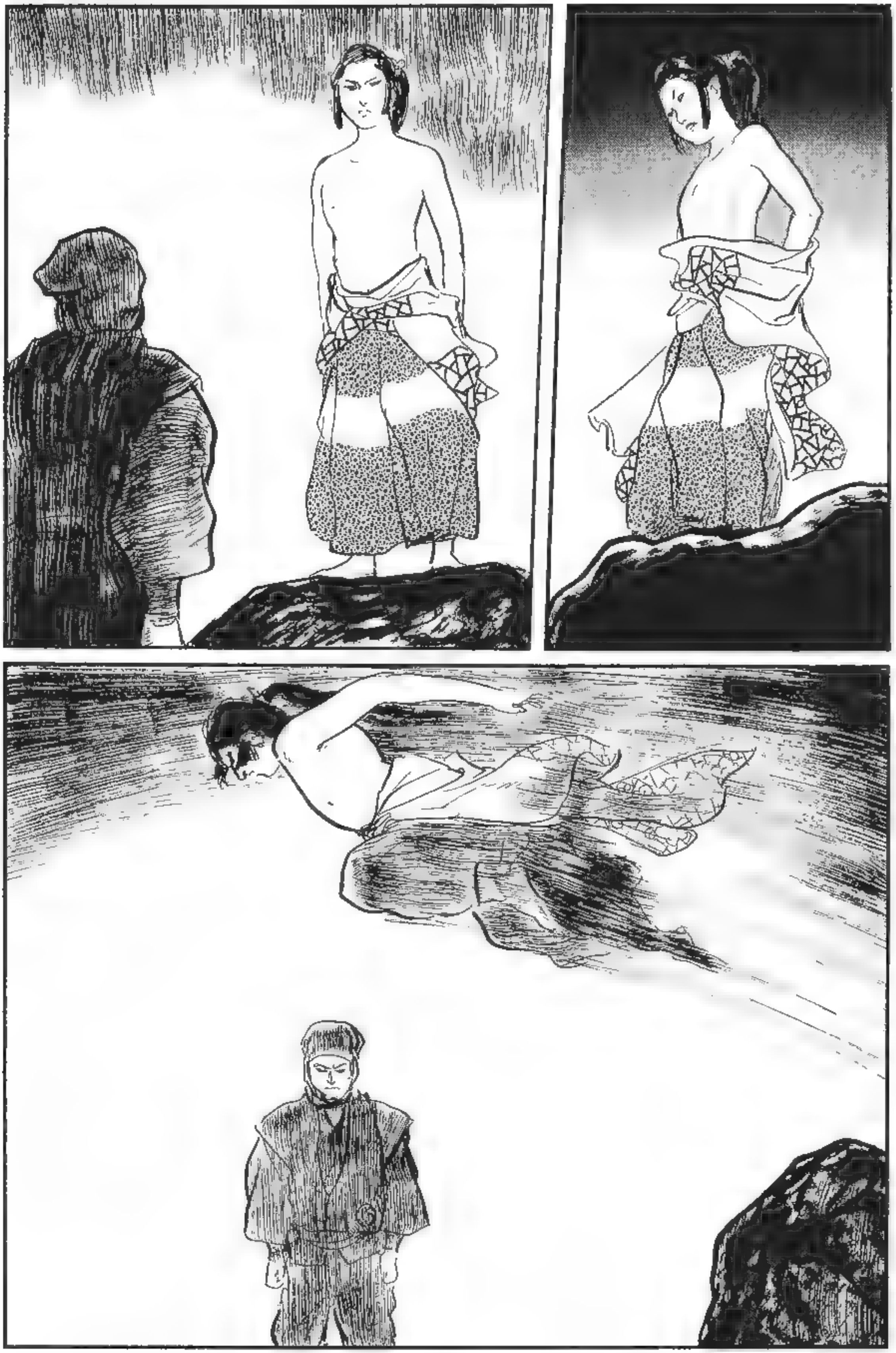
LET'S SETTLE THIS ANOTHER WAY.

ITOMARU! THIS PUTS YOU IN AN EVEN MORE AWKWARD POSITION.

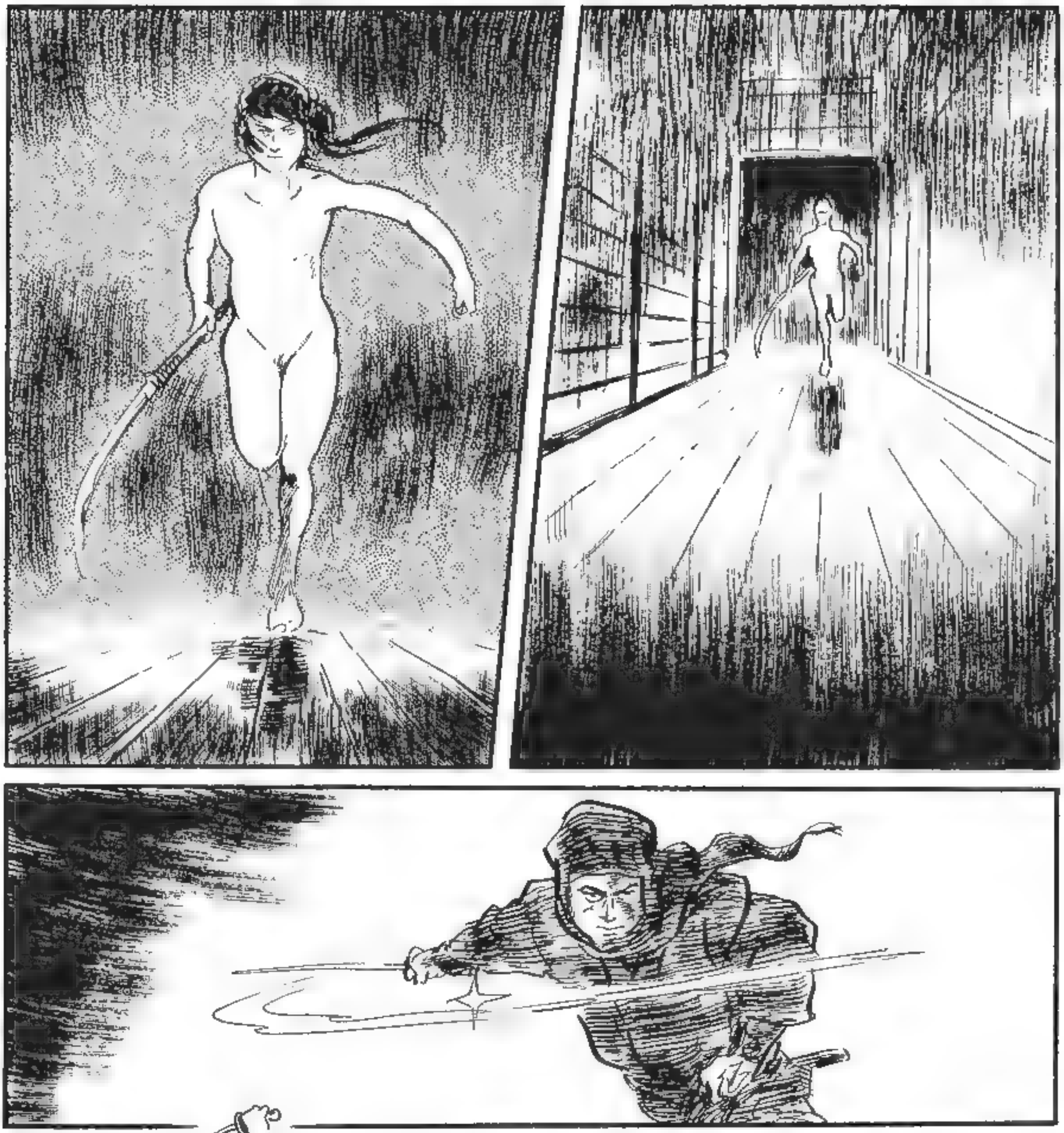
NOBUNAGA-*DONO*, ONLY IF YOU PERMIT IT.

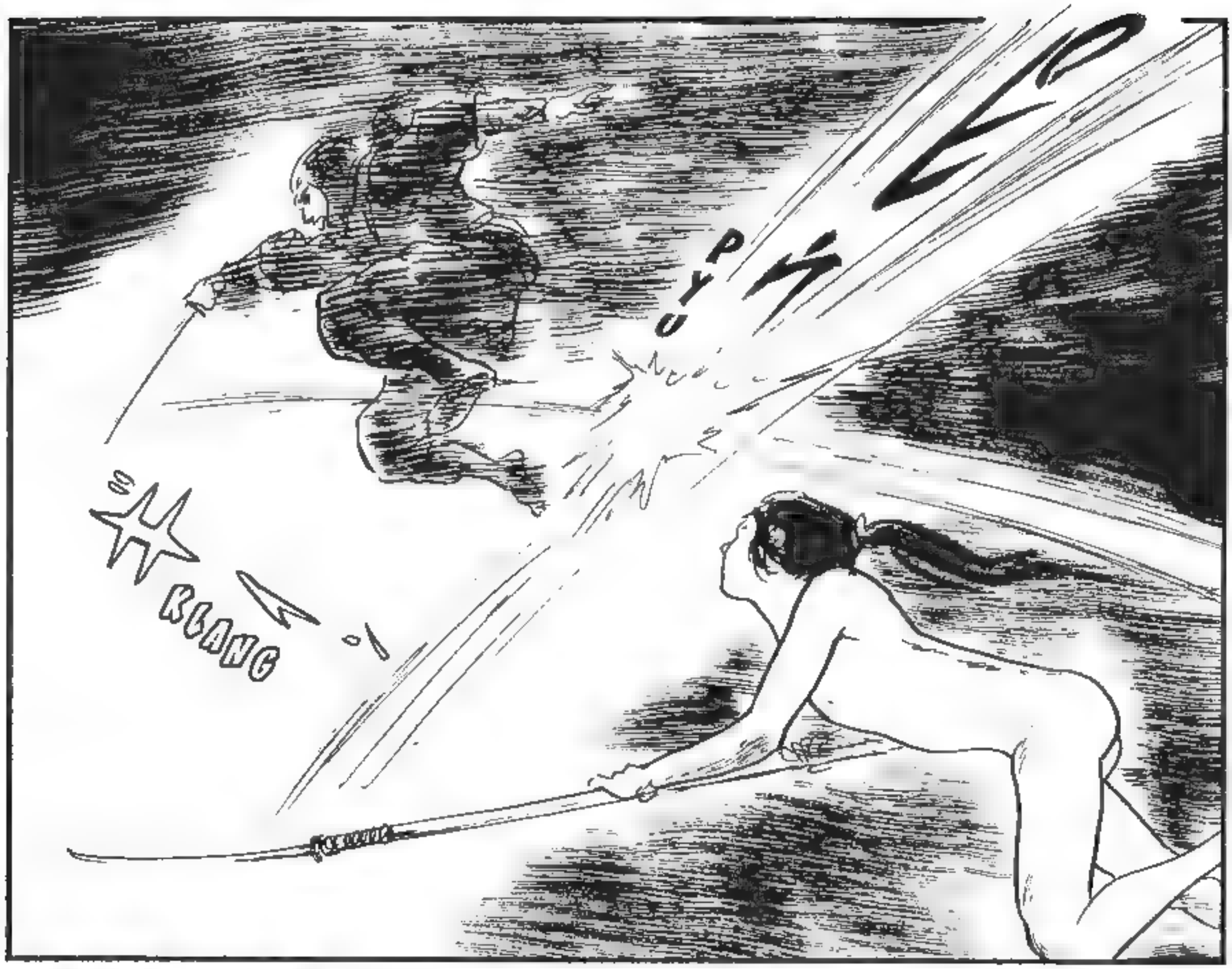
HANZŌ SEEKS PERMISSION TO FIGHT, WHILE YOU TEND TO DECIDE WHAT TO DO ON YOUR OWN.

FINE. FIGHT.



ああ!?




SWISH
CLANG

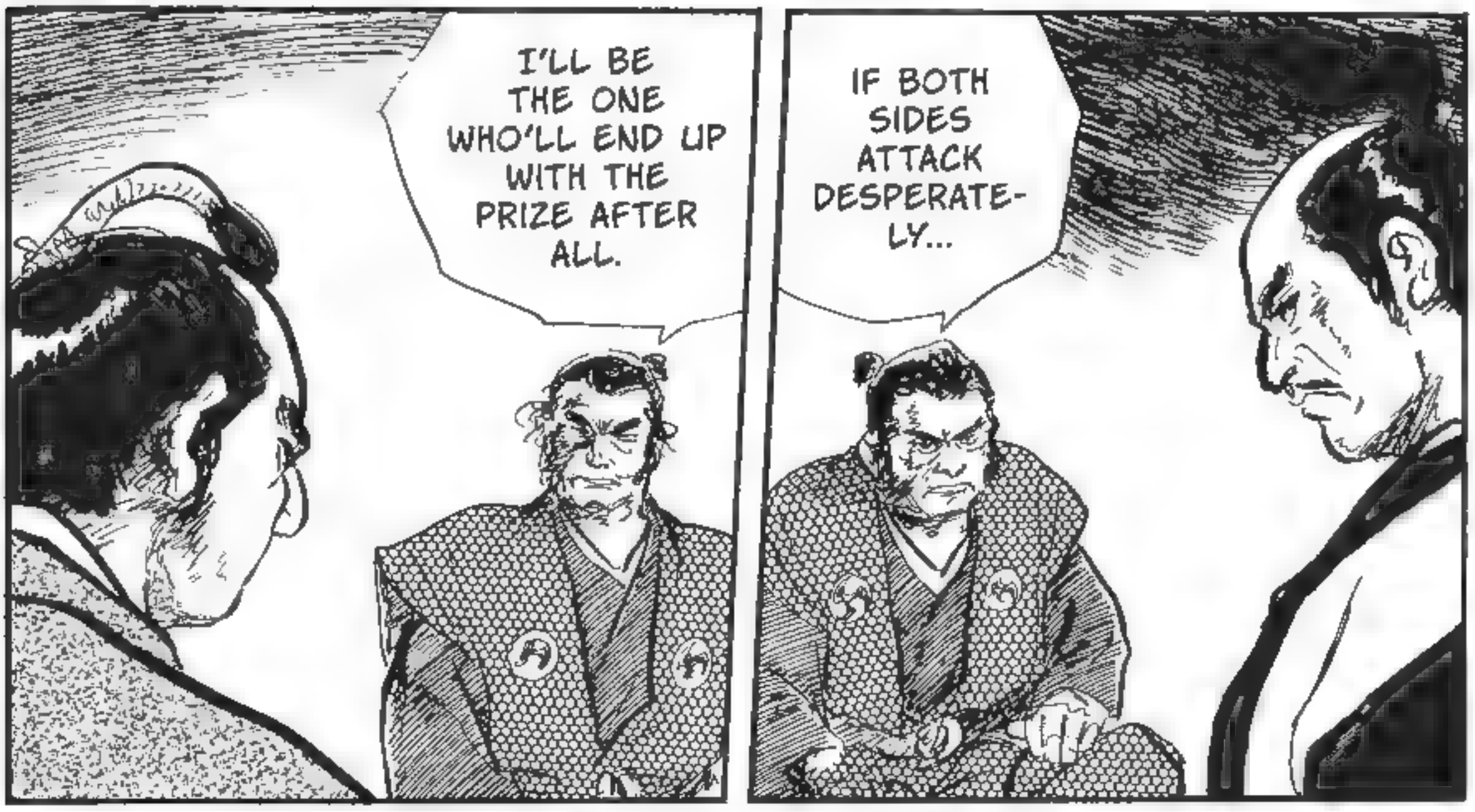
FWOOSH

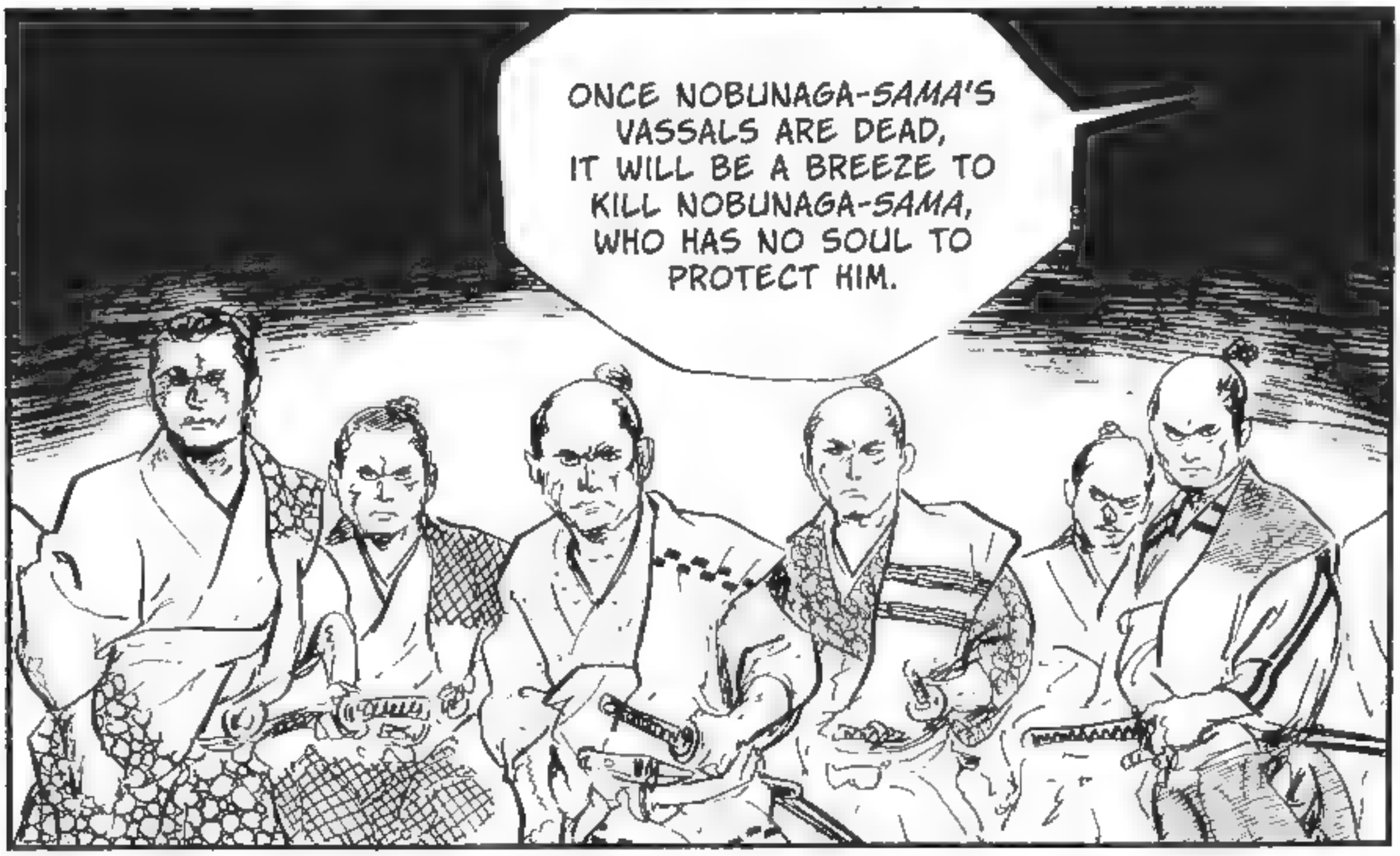
AAAA

GREAT.
THIS IS GREAT.
HA HA HA
HA HA
HA.

HA HA
HA HA...

FIGHT WITH ALL YOUR STRENGTH!
NOW FIGHT!


I'LL BE THE ONE WHO'LL END UP WITH THE PRIZE AFTER ALL.
IF BOTH SIDES ATTACK DESPERATE-LY...


ONCE NOBUNAGA-SAMA'S VASSALS ARE DEAD, IT WILL BE A BREEZE TO KILL NOBUNAGA-SAMA, WHO HAS NO SOUL TO PROTECT HIM.

...IF HIS VASSALS SEND THEM TO THEIR GRAVES INSTEAD, IT WILL BE EASY TO CHOP OFF IEYASU-SAMA'S HEAD.

AND...

AND IF NEITHER SIDE STOPS FIGHTING UNTIL NO ONE IS LEFT STANDING...

HA HA HA

I'LL RUN OFF WITH THE PRIZE, INDEED.

I'LL BE THE ONE WHO HAS IT ALL IN MY HANDS.

START FIGHTING!

NOW WHAT ARE YOU DOING?!

GO!

ATTACK!

IEYASU-*DONO*, WHAT DO YOU SAY?

THIS IS HAPPENING BECAUSE YOU BROUGHT *IGAMONO* INSIDE THE CASTLE TO BEGIN WITH.

LEAVE.

AS YOSHITAKA SAYS, SHALL WE LET HIM TAKE OUR HEADS?

BUT WHAT ABOUT ITOMARU?

IT WAS ONLY A SHOW.

...
...

NOBUNAGA-*SAMA*, ITOMARU WAS YOUR ATTENDANT WHO UNDERSTOOD YOUR MIND. BUT HANZŌ IS A SOLDIER WHO SIMPLY PROTECTS YOUR LIFE.

I BELIEVE YOU NOW SEE THE TRUE POWER OF *IGAMONO*.

...
...

THE MAN WHO SHIELDS YOU. THE MAN WHO RULES THE DARK. NOBUNAGA-*DONO*, ISN'T THAT THE KIND OF MAN YOU NEED THE MOST RIGHT NOW?

...

...!!

NOBUNAGA-*DONO*, I WOULD LIKE TO PROTECT YOU FROM THE DARK, AND THEREFORE I WOULD LIKE TO OFFER HANZŌ TO YOU.

I COUNT ON YOU.

HAN-ZŌ!

NOBUNAGA-*SAMA* IS SUSPICIOUS OF IEYASU-*SAMA*. KNOWING HOW YOUR MASTER FELT, YOU OFFERED YOUR LIFE TO MAKE KNOWN WHAT WAS IN OUR MINDS.

YOU WERE PREPARED TO DIE THE MOMENT NOBUNAGA-*SAMA* GRANTED YOU PERMISSION TO FIGHT.

A SOLDIER IS A SAD THING.

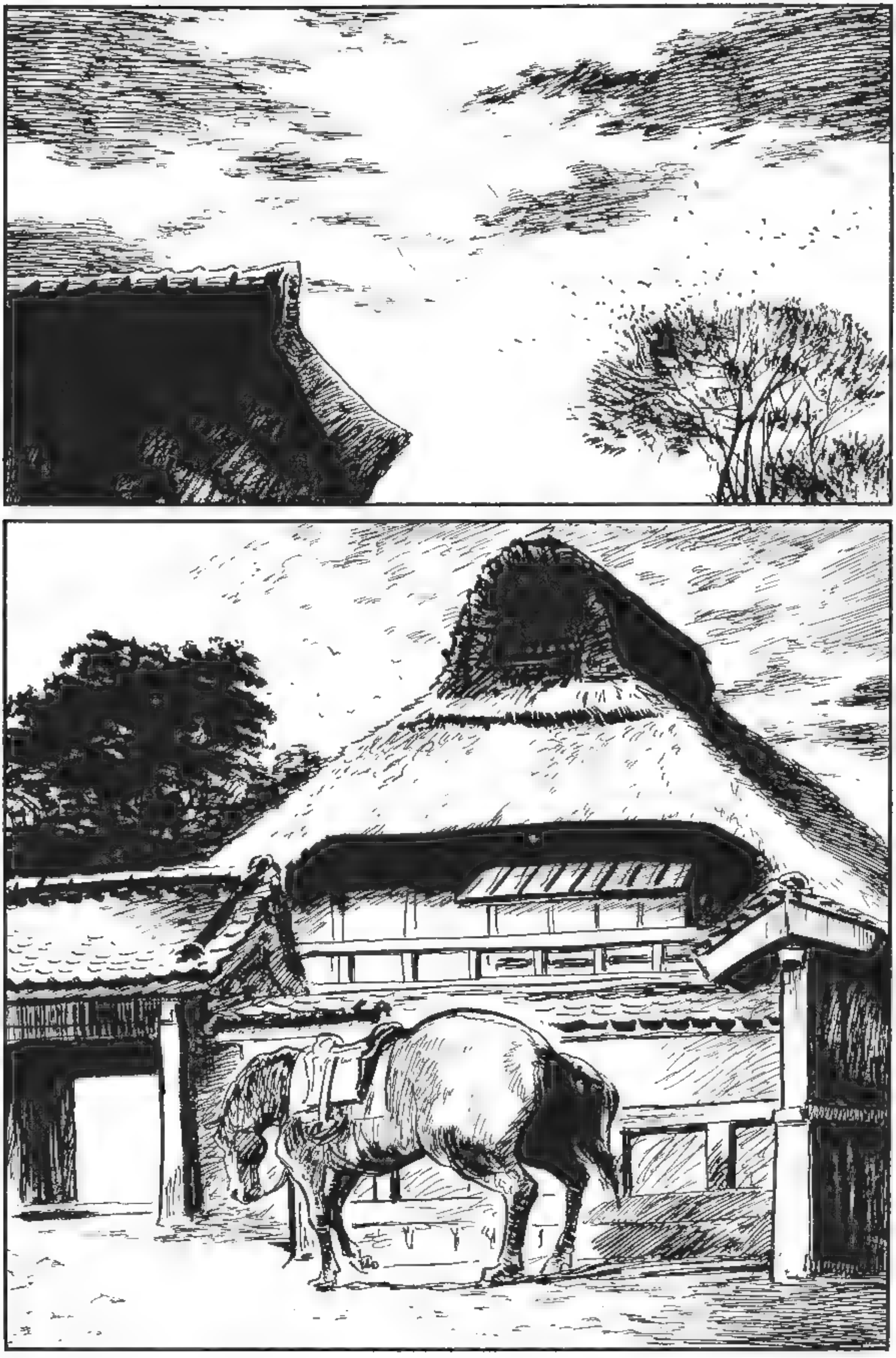
AND YOU ACTED AS YOUR MASTER NOBUNAGA'S HEART DICTATED.

I PROCEEDED AS MY MASTER IEYASU ORDERED ME TO.

THAT'S WHY YOU TOOK CARE NOT TO STAIN THE BEAUTIFUL *KOSODE* ROBE YOUR MASTER HAD GIVEN YOU.

A SOLDIER IS A SAD THING, INDEED.

AS SOLDIERS, THERE'S NOTHING DIFFERENT BETWEEN US.



信士

THIS MAY BE THE LAST TIME I PRAY HERE.

UKITA NAOIE-*DONO* OF BIZEN CAME TO PAY ME A VISIT. SO I ENTREATED MILORD TO GRANT HIM *GOSHUINJŌ*. IT BACKFIRED, AND MILORD REBUKED ME FOR TAKING SUCH LIBERTY.

IN ADDITION, I FELL INTO MILORD'S DISFAVOR TODAY.

WE WILL HAVE A FULL-SCALE WAR AGAINST MŌRI.

THAT'S WHY...

OYŌ-DONO, THIS IS PROBABLY OUR LAST MEETING.

HE SAID HE'D NEVER SEE ME IN PERSON AGAIN.

LET ME PREPARE IT RIGHT AWAY.

MAY I AT LEAST HAVE A DRINK IN FRONT OF HANBEI'S TABLET?

WHEN I ASKED HANBEI TO LET ME HAVE YOU, *OYŌ-DONO*, HE SAID ONLY IF I HAVE THE STOMACH TO KILL IEYASU.

MY BROTHER SPOKE FROM HIS PERSPECTIVE, AND I HAVE MY OWN.

YOU HEARD US. SO TELL ME, WHAT WENT THROUGH YOUR MIND THEN?

THEY MUST WORRY ABOUT THEIR HUSBANDS, AND IF THEY HAVE A SON, THEY MUST WORRY ABOUT HIM, TOO. IT IS THE WOMEN WHO CONSTANTLY FACE DEATH.

WOMEN IN THIS TIME OF WARRING STATES ARE PLACED IN A TRULY BITTER POSITION.

WE'RE ALSO USED AS POLITICAL TOOLS, AND OUR WISHES ARE NEVER RESPECTED.

GIVEN THE SITUATION, I FEEL I AM HAPPIEST THE WAY THINGS ARE. I HAVE NO WISH TO BE YOURS, SIR.

IT DOESN'T MEAN I DISLIKE YOU OR ANYTHING OF THE SORT.

PLEASE PARDON ME.

I'VE LONGED TO BE WITH *OYŌ-DONO* FOR A VERY LONG TIME.

AH...HOW BEAUTIFUL. HOW VERY BEAUTIFUL SHE IS.

TONIGHT, I MUST HAVE HER BEFORE I LEAVE, WHATEVER IT TAKES.

NO MATTER WHAT.

THAT'S WHY SHE'S SO CALM. I CAN'T ASSAULT HER.

BUT IF I TRY TO RAPE HER, SHE'LL PROBABLY BITE HER TONGUE...

NOW, WHAT OTHER OPTIONS DO I HAVE?

OYŌ IS THAT SORT OF WOMAN.

HANBEI, I TOO WILL BE WHERE YOU ARE SOON.
WHOO. I'M DRUNK.
I ALMOST FORGOT THE MOST IMPORTANT THING.
OH, BY THE WAY.

HUH?!

OYŌ-DONO, WILL YOU GIVE ME ONE OF YOUR INTIMATE HAIRS?

ONE FROM YOUR VAGINA, YOU KNOW?

I MEAN, THE HAIR FROM YOUR PRIVATE PARTS.

I'VE GOT MY MOTHER'S AND MY WIFE'S IN HERE.

BUT WITHOUT THE MOST POWERFUL ONE IN HERE, I MAY NOT SURVIVE OUR ATTACK ON MŌRI.

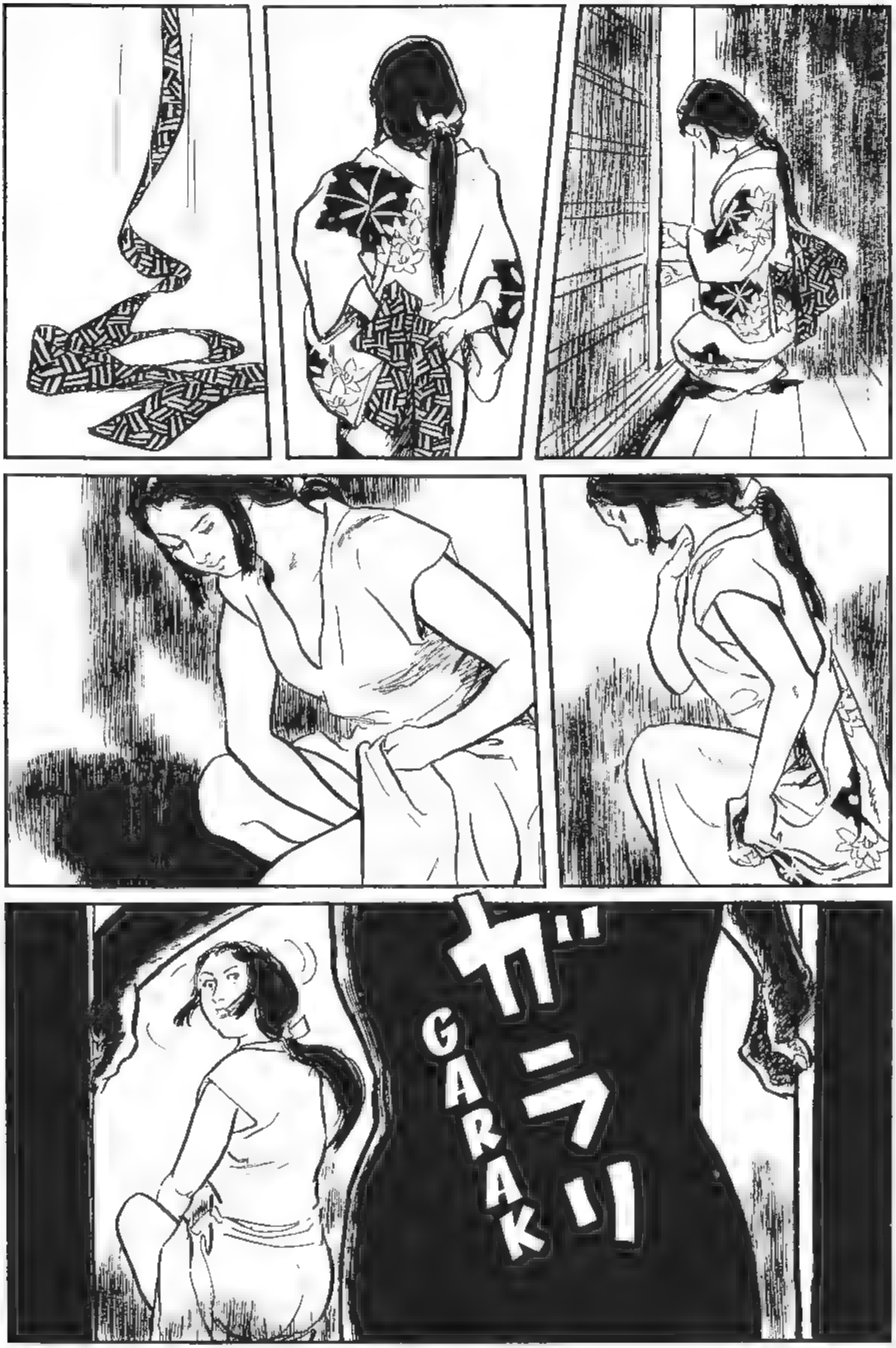
AND UNTIL TODAY, MY WIFE'S SHIELDED ME FROM HARM.

BEFORE I HAD A WIFE, MY MOTHER'S PRO-TECTED ME.

THAT'S WHY I FEEL THAT IF HIS SISTER'S PUBIC HAIR IS IN THIS AMULET, ITS PROTECTION WILL BE INFALLIBLE.

HANBEI PROTECTED AND GUIDED ME AS MY ADVISOR.

SO PLEASE, I BEG YOU.


TAK JI GARAK

SSSSA
AHH!

AHHH!!
HE TOOK HER BY SURPRISE. THAT'S EXACTLY WHAT HAPPENED.
SSSSS

PLEASE DON'T!

BITING ONE'S TONGUE REQUIRES TREMENDOUS FOCUS AND TENSION. THE ACT OF PULLING OUT HER PUBIC HAIR RELAXED *OYŌ*, AND IN SOME WAYS, SHE HAD ALREADY ACCEPTED HIDEYOSHI BY THEN.

PLEASE BEAR IT.

PLEASE.

YOU'LL BE FINE. IT HURTS ONLY AT FIRST.

I'M FOND OF YOU, OYŌ.

THEY SAY THAT HIDEYOSHI EXCELLED IN TAKING EVERYONE BY SURPRISE, WHEREAS IEYASU ENDURED BY APPEALING TO PEOPLE.

HANZŌ!!

YES, SIR. I'M HERE.

...ALWAYS KEEPING YOURSELF HIDDEN?!

DOES RULING IN THE DARK MEAN...

EVEN IF AN ARMY STORMS IN SUDDENLY, MY MEN, WHO ARE ALSO HIDDEN, WILL WARN US BY SHOOTING ARROWS. THIS WAY YOU WILL BE ABLE TO ESCAPE EASILY.

I BEG YOUR PARDON, SIR, BUT I BELIEVE MY CONCEALMENT ALSO SERVES TO HIDE YOU IN AN EMERGENCY.

...IGAMONO ARE HIDING ALONG EVERY MOUNTAIN RIDGE AND EVERY RIVER. THEY WILL NOT ONLY DEFEND YOU BUT ALSO GUIDE YOU TO SAFETY.

FURTHER-MORE, IN REGARDS TO THE ESCAPE ROUTE...

YOU MAY SAY YOU USED TO HAVE ITOMARU-*DONO* BY YOUR SIDE.

BUT IT WOULD HAVE BEEN IMPOSSIBLE TO PROTECT YOU, SIR, WITH ITOMARU-*DONO* ALONE OR WITH THE FEW MEN WHO SERVED UNDER HIM.

HANZŌ.

YES, SIR.

THIS IS ALL FOR YOUR BENEFIT, AND THAT IS WHAT MY MASTER MEANT.

IGAMONO ARE THOUSANDS IN NUMBER. THAT IS WHY YOU CAN RULE THE DARK BY LETTING US LOOSE AND USING US IN THE SHADOWS.

DARKNESS IS INFINITE.

RULING THE DARK? ARE YOU TELLING ME TO BECOME THE SUN?

IT IS ONLY THE SUNSHINE THAT CAN LIGHT UP EVERY SHADOW.

ARE YOU TELLING ME TO CALL BACK THE SETTING SUN, LIKE KIYOMORI DID?!

THIS ISN'T ABOUT ATTACKING BUT ABOUT DEFENDING. ALL WE'RE SAYING IS THAT WE SHOULD ENSURE THAT THE DARKNESS THAT SURROUNDS YOU IS SAFE.

NO... NEVER, SIR!

THAT THIS WAS WHAT HE MEANT BY RULING THE DARK;

HANZŌ THOUGHT NOBUNAGA WAS INDIRECTLY SUGGESTING THAT HE KILL KATSUYORI, JUST LIKE HE KILLED SHINGEN; THAT HE SHOULD ASSASSINATE ANY WARLORDS WHO STOOD IN NOBUNAGA'S WAY, FROM THE DARK, ONE AFTER THE OTHER;

IF IT WAS DONE, THERE WOULD BE RETALIATION. IF NOBUNAGA WAS REPELLED BY FORCE, THAT WAS ONE THING, BUT NEVER WOULD HE ALLOW ANYONE TO KILL HIM IN HIS SLEEP. THE INTENSITY OF HIS DESIRE HAD TRANSFORMED INTO A STRONG AVERSION AGAINST SNEAK ATTACKS. HANZŌ FELT NOBUNAGA'S WILL PUMMELING HIM OVER AND OVER.

AND THAT IT WAS THE SAME AS ATTACKING IN THE DARK. AND YET, HANZŌ SENSED HE MUST NEVER DO SO. AS FAR AS NOBUNAGA WAS CONCERNED, WAR WAS ABOUT PUSHING WITH OPEN FORCE. TAKING A GENERAL'S HEAD BY STEALTH SHOULD NEVER BE PERMITTED.

HANZŌ ALSO FELT THAT NOBUNAGA DISLIKED HIM. NOBUNAGA SUSPECTED THAT HANZŌ HAD KILLED SHINGEN, AND HANZŌ SENSED THAT NOBUNAGA HATED THE IDEA OF ALLOWING *SHINOBI* TO CHANGE THE FATE OF THE WAR.

HANZŌ REALIZED IT WAS USELESS TO ARGUE.

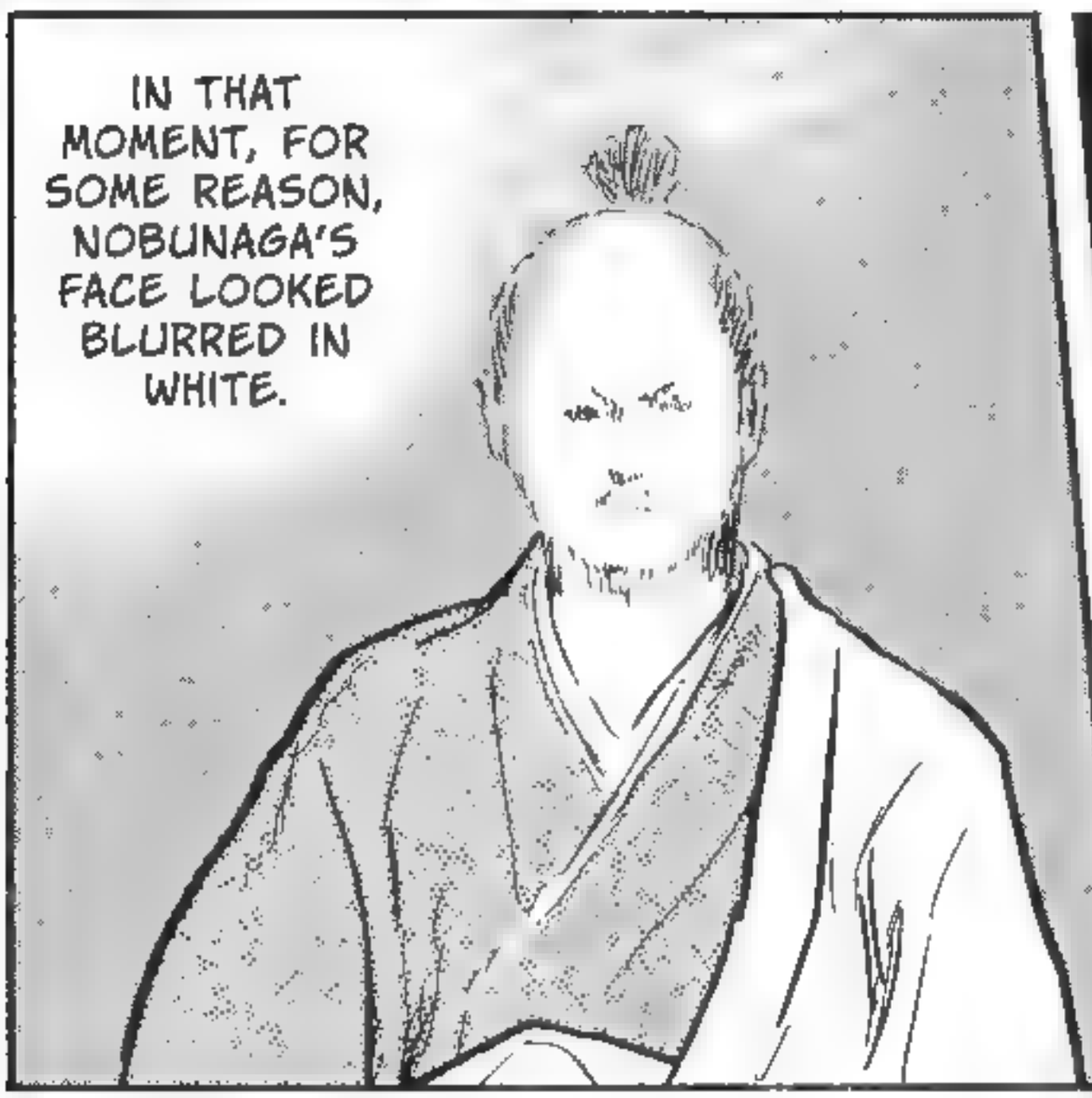
YES, SIR.

HANZŌ.

YES, SIR.

I DO NOT NEED *IGAMONO*. GO BACK TO HAMAMATSU.

WHERE ON EARTH COULD THERE BE A MAN WHO'D COME AND SLIT MY THROAT WHILE I'M ASLEEP?!


IN THAT MOMENT, FOR SOME REASON, NOBUNAGA'S FACE LOOKED BLURRED IN WHITE.

A TRUE WARLORD FEARS THE DARK. THE MOMENT ONE STOPS BEING AFRAID OF IT, HE BECOMES CARELESS.

ONCE I LEAVE, NONE OF US WILL BE LEFT WHO HAVE PROTECTED NOBUNAGA-*SAMA*.

TO TELL THE TRUTH, I DON'T WANT TO GO.

HANZŌ FELT THAT HIDEYOSHI'S WORDS CONFIRMED AGAIN THAT IT WAS HIDEYOSHI WHO'D DEFENDED NOBUNAGA FROM THE DARKNESS, AND THAT HIDEYOSHI WAS INDEED *SHINOBI* JUST LIKE HIM.

HANZŌ-*SAMA*, I FELT AT EASE ONLY BECAUSE I HEARD YOU'D BE HERE.

BUT HIDEYOSHI WAS LEAVING FOR CHŪGOKU TO ATTACK MŌRI. WHO WOULD PROTECT NOBUNAGA FROM THE DARK NOW?

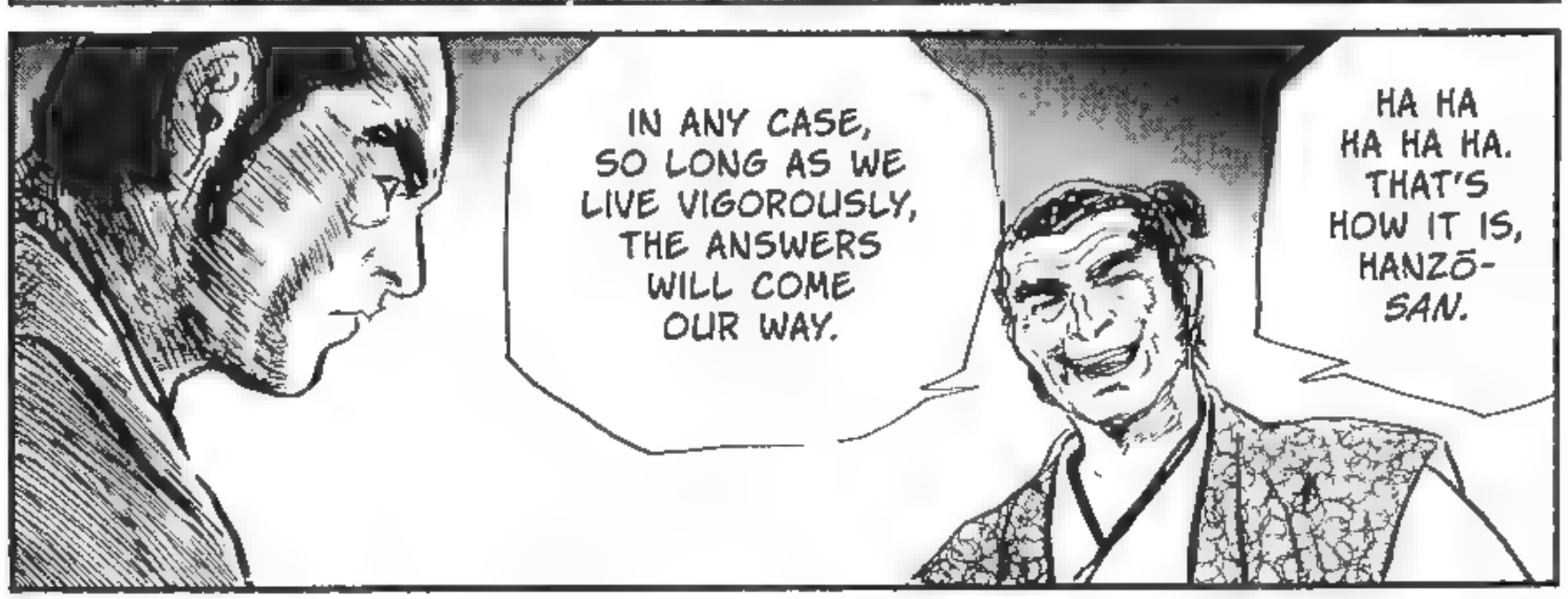
I MAY NOT SURVIVE. MAN IS TENACIOUS. THEY'VE GOT LOTS OF PEOPLE, TOO

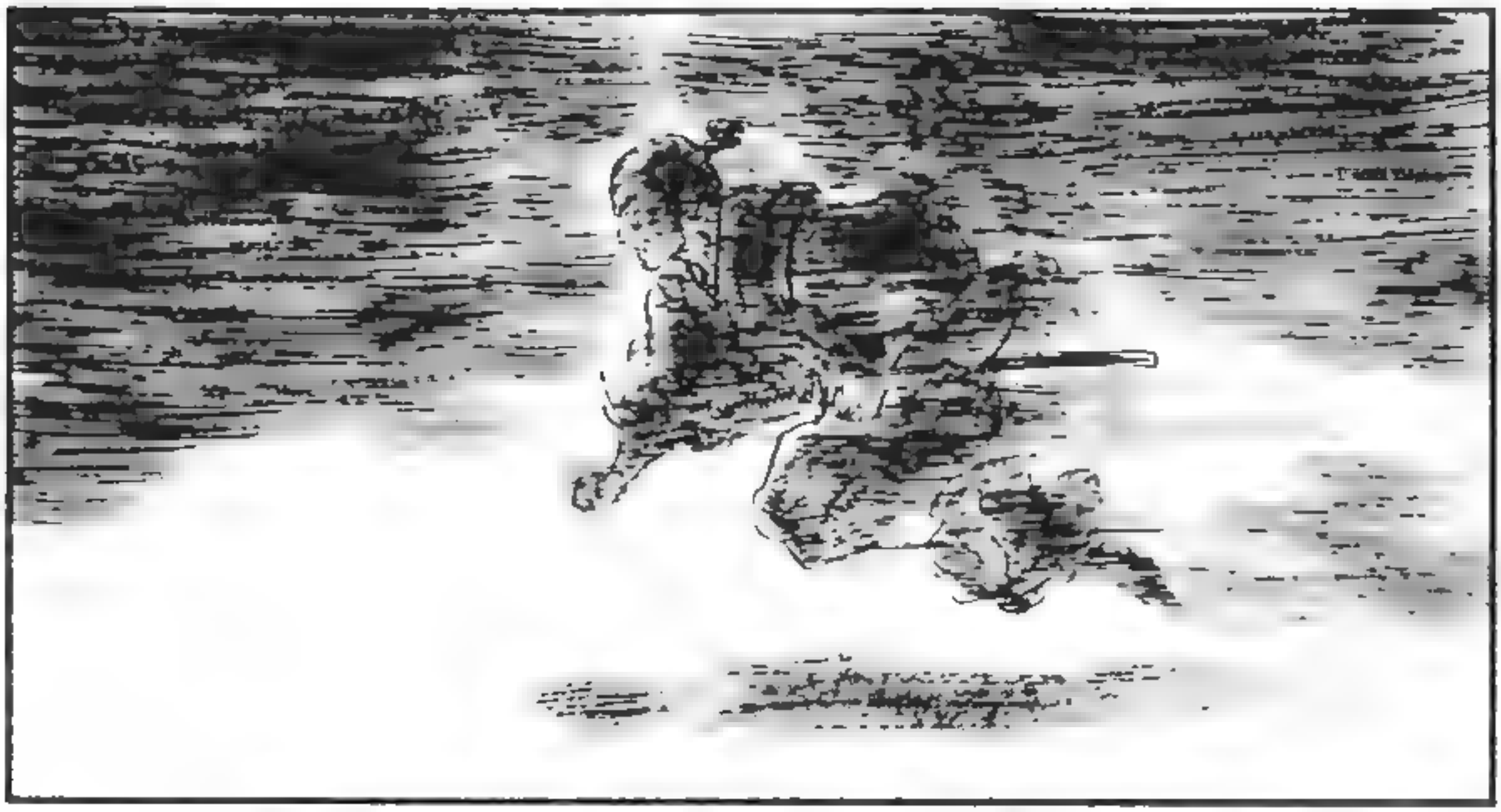
I WONDER HOW THE FATES WILL DEAL WITH US

YES

PLEASE SEND MY REGARDS TO ETASU-SAMA

YOU ARE... TAKENAKA-SAMA'S...


IN ANY CASE, SO LONG AS WE LIVE VIGOROUSLY, THE ANSWERS WILL COME OUR WAY.
HA HA HA HA HA. THAT'S HOW IT IS, HANZŌ-SAN.



LIVE VIGOROUSLY, EH?

AFTER THE BATTLE OF NAGASHINO, IEYASU BEGAN ATTACKING TAKEDA'S CASTLES ONE AFTER THE OTHER-- SUWAHARA, FUTAMATA, AND KOYAMA.

ZU DO DO DO DO

TAKEDA KATSUYORI HIMSELF CAME, LEADING AN ARMY OF OVER TEN THOUSAND, BUT FROM WHAT I HEAR, HE TURNED AROUND AT THE HALFWAY POINT AND WENT BACK.

DIDN'T TAKEDA SEND REINFORCE-MENTS?

ODA NOBUTADA-*SAMA* WON THE SURRENDER OF TAKEDA'S IWAMURA CASTLE IN MINŌ.

HMMM!

WENT BACK...?

...EVEN IF HE HAD TO DESERT IWAMURA CASTLE.

HE DECIDED TO PRESERVE HIS REMAINING POWER...

HM.
TAKEDA KATSUYORI TOOK HŌJŌ UJIMASA'S SISTER AS HIS WIFE.

IT'S LIKE THE SNOW.

THEIR ALLIANCE WILL MELT SOONER OR LATER.

KATSUYORI IS LOSING HIS COOL, I THINK.

I KNOW THAT A LOT BETTER THAN ANYONE ELSE.

THERE'S NOTHING AS WEAK AS A RELATIONSHIP ESTABLISHED THROUGH WOMEN.

WHAT IF WE ATTACK THEM NOW?

THE NIGHTMARES I HAVE MOST OFTEN ARE THE ONES ABOUT SHINGEN.

I SWEAT EVEN WHEN IT'S FREEZING COLD. PEOPLE ARE INDEED CREATURES WHOSE BODIES ARE CONTROLLED BY THEIR MINDS.

THEY ALL LEAVE ME DRENCHED IN SWEAT.

I OFTEN HAVE NIGHTMARES. I STILL DO.

HIS FACE...

HIS FLAG MARK...

諏方南宮上下大明神

疾如風徐如林侵如火不動如山

MOVE AS SW FT AS A WIND, STAY AS SILENT AS A FOREST ATTACK AS FIERCE AS F RE, DEFEND AS UNMOVABLE AS A MOUNTAIN

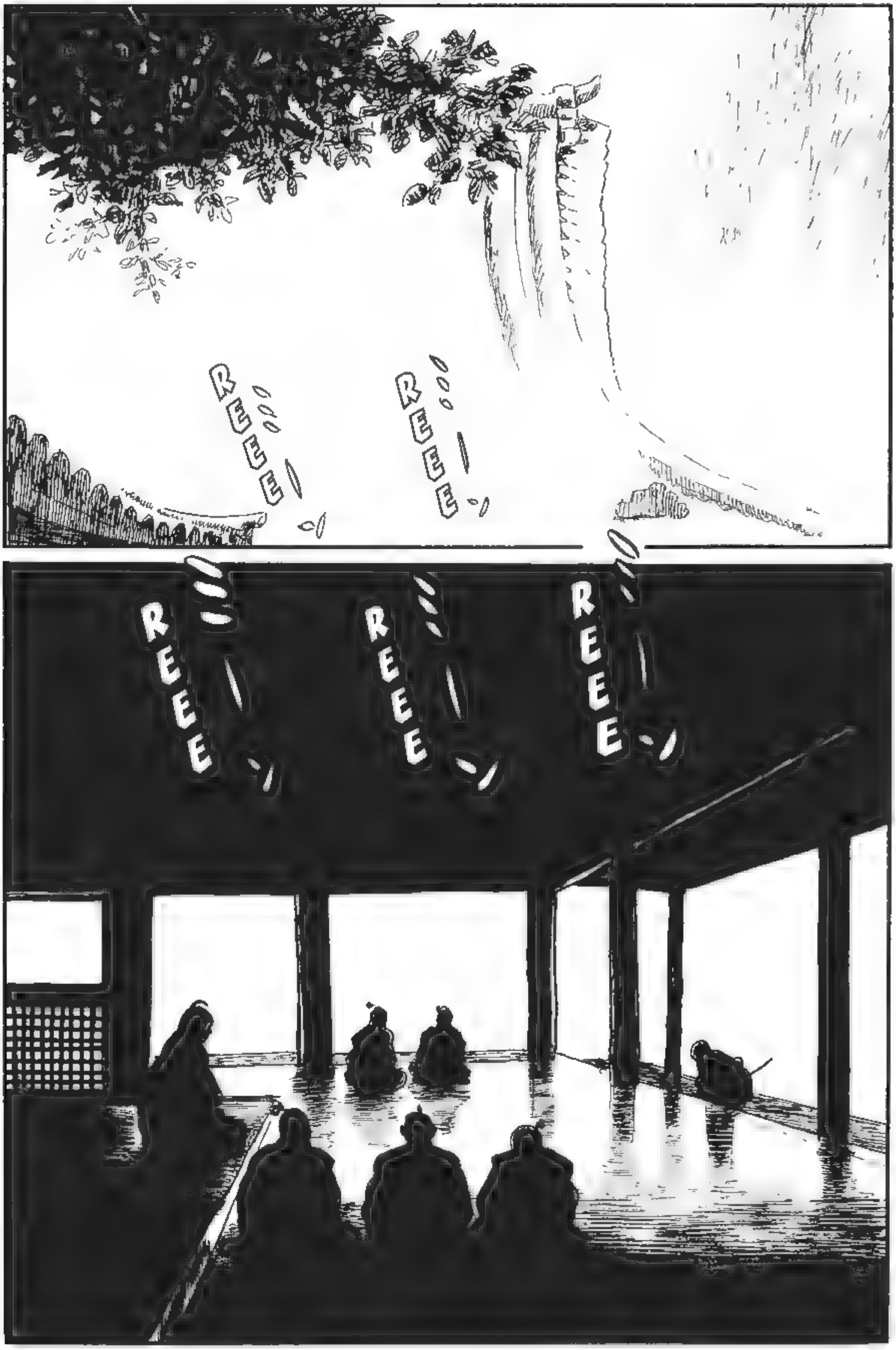
HIS CAVALRY...

KNOWING MY OWN PLACE. HANZŌ, THAT'S WHAT'S MOST IMPORTANT.

I WANT TO FIGHT ALWAYS REMEMBERING WHERE I STAND.

I DO NOT WANT TO RISK OVER-REACHING.

SHINGEN MAY BE DEAD, AND HIS CASTLES MIGHT FALL ONE AFTER THE OTHER, BUT TAKEDA IS STILL TAKEDA. IT'S STILL TOO SOON TO CHARGE STRAIGHT IN.


REEE
REEE
REEE
REEE

ER...UESUGI KENSHIN DIED SUDDENLY.

YES, SIR. IT'S FROM A VERY RELIABLE SOURCE.

THAT'S A SOLID FACT?

KENSHIN HAS TWO ADOPTED SONS.

MOST LIKELY, THERE WILL BE AN INTERNAL POWER STRUGGLE.

I THINK THAT'S THE ONLY POLITICAL MISTAKE SHINGEN MADE IN HIS LIFE.

KAGETORA IS OF HŌJŌ'S BLOOD. HE IS A BROTHER OF KATSUYORI'S WIFE. SO NATURALLY, WOULDN'T KATSUYORI HELP KAGETORA...?

THE QUESTION IS, WHICH SIDE WILL TAKEDA KATSUYORI TAKE?

IF KAGETORA DEFEATS KAGEKATSU AND INHERITS THE UESUGI CLAN, HŌJŌ WILL BECOME EXTREMELY POWERFUL.

IN THAT CASE, TAKEDA AND HŌJŌ WILL NO LONGER BE ALLIES BUT MASTER AND SERVANT.

SO MUCH SO THAT EVEN KATSUYORI MAY BE LEFT WITH NO CHOICE EXCEPT TO BOW TO THEM.

THE QUESTION IS, WILL KATSUYORI FEEL HUMILIATED BY THE IDEA?

REEE

REEE

IT'S OVER. I WON'T HAVE NIGHTMARES ABOUT SHINGEN EVER AGAIN.

TAKEDA KATSUYORI TOOK THE SIDE OF UESUGI KAGEKATSU!

KAGEKATSU WON AN OVERWHELMING VICTORY AT OTATE. KAGETORA KILLED HIMSELF, AND KAGEKATSU IS NOW THE SOLE HEIR TO THE UESUGI CLAN. KATSUYORI IMMEDIATELY SENT HIS SISTER TO MARRY HIM.

WE'LL ATTACK TAKEDA!

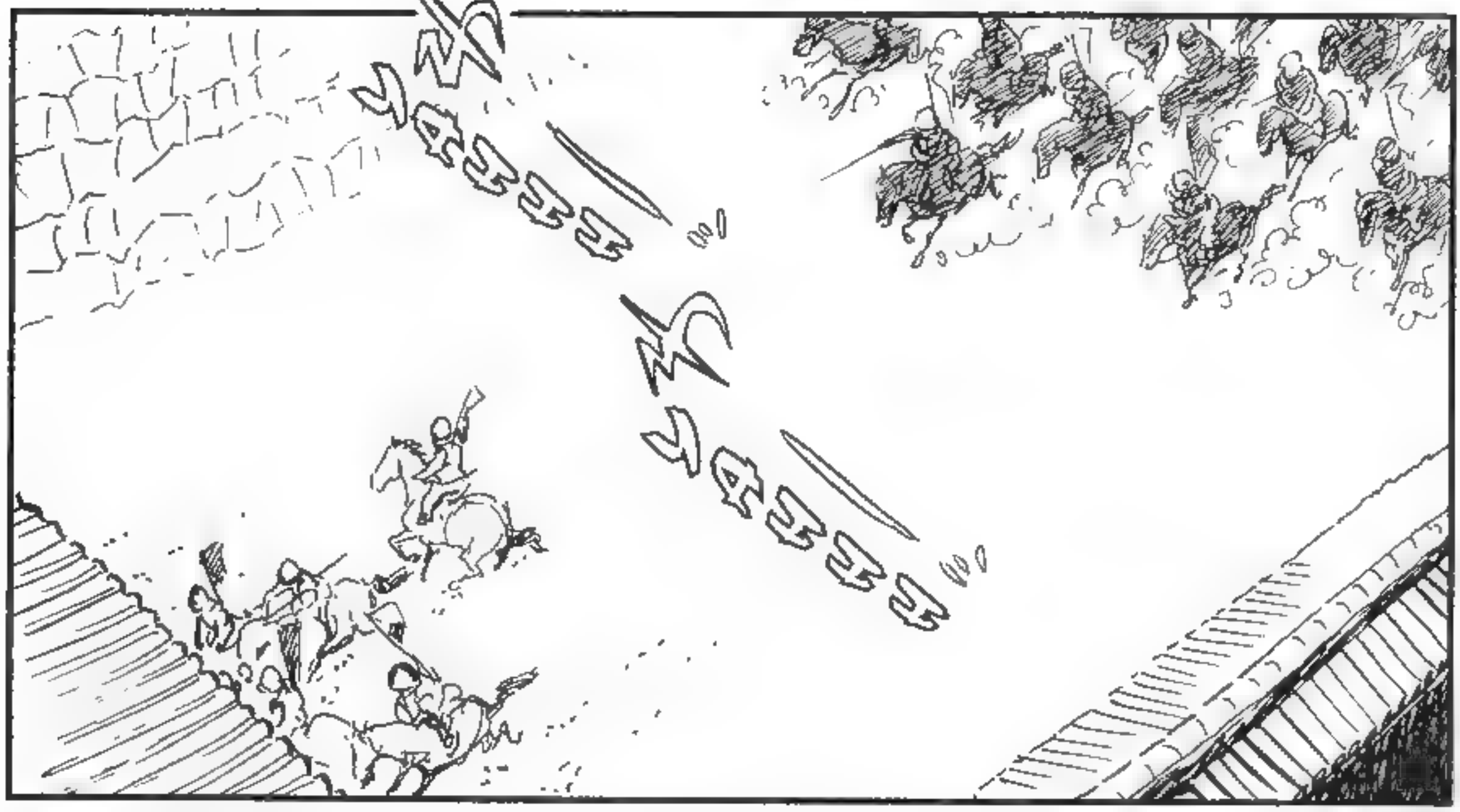
AND I'LL FULFILL MY GREATEST WISH. LET'S TAKE BACK TAKATENJIN CASTLE!

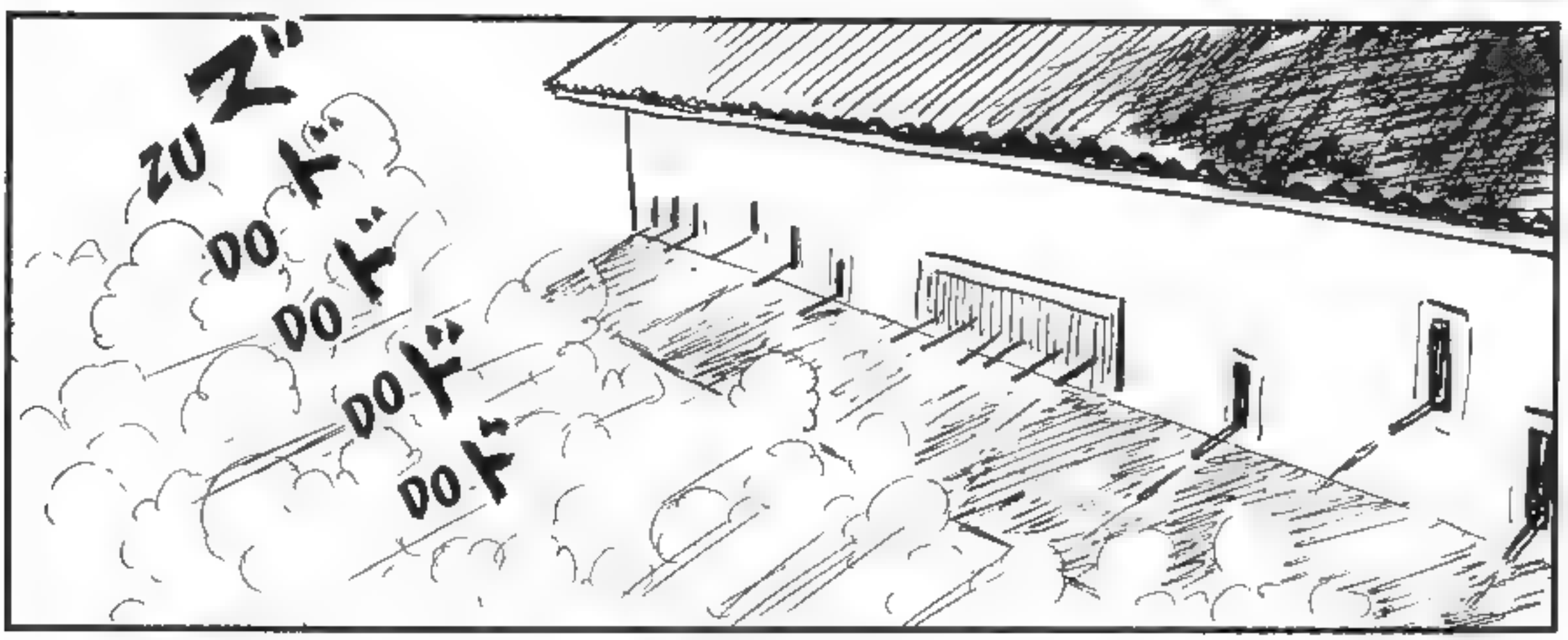
HŌJŌ WILL BREAK THEIR ALLIANCE. I SEE TAKEDA'S FATE.

YAHHH!

PULL BACK!

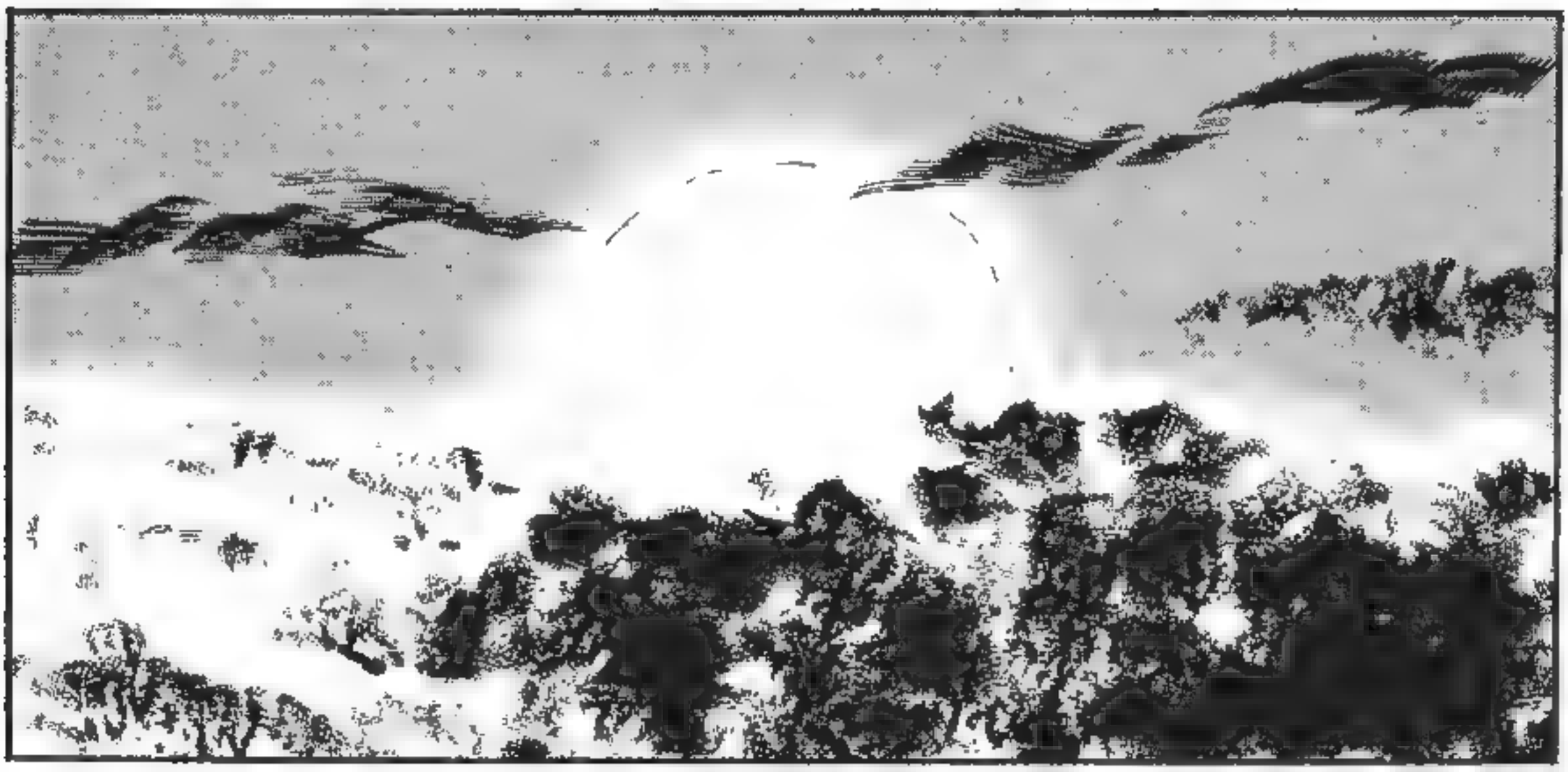
PULL BACK!

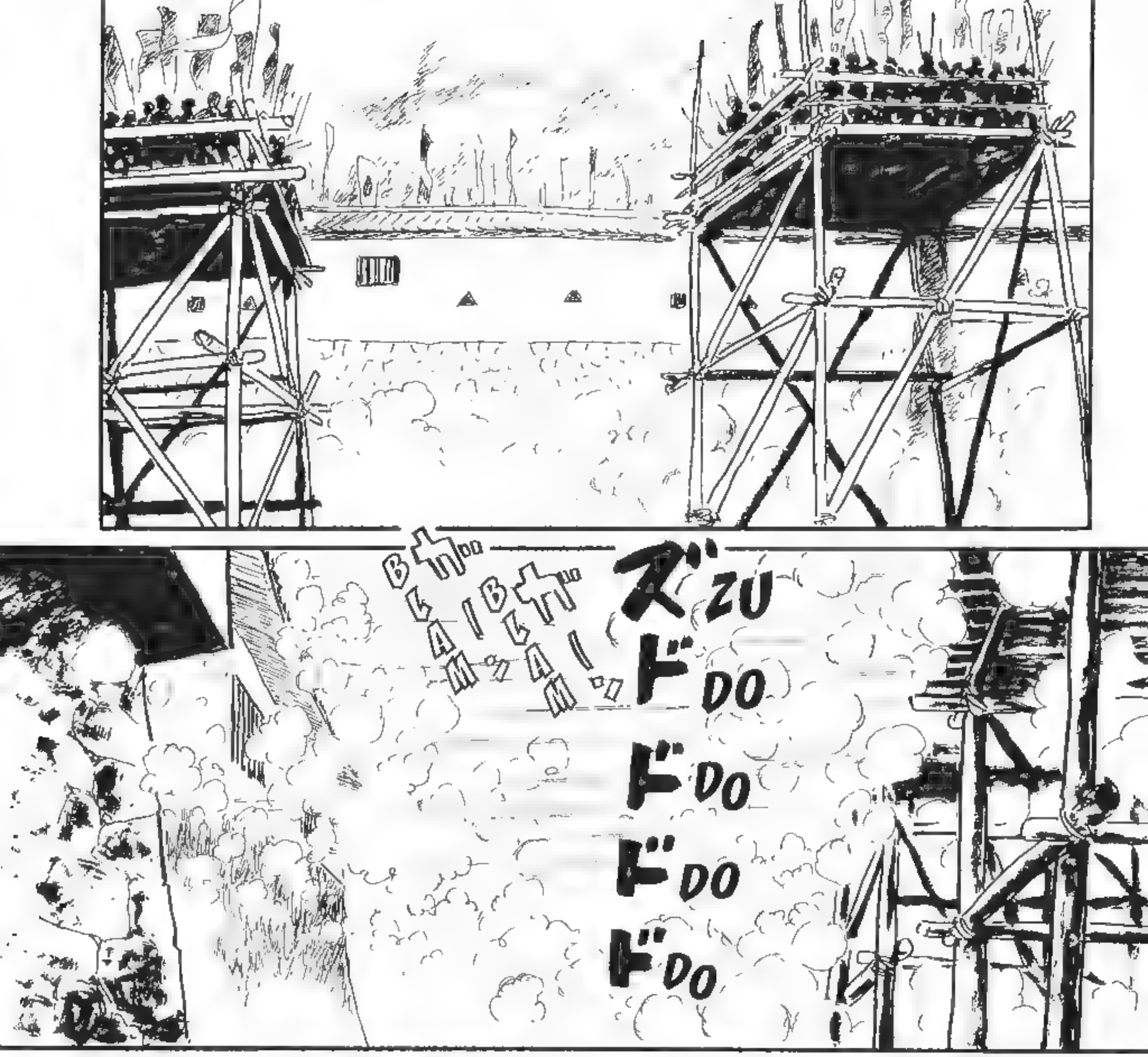



ズズズズ
ドドド

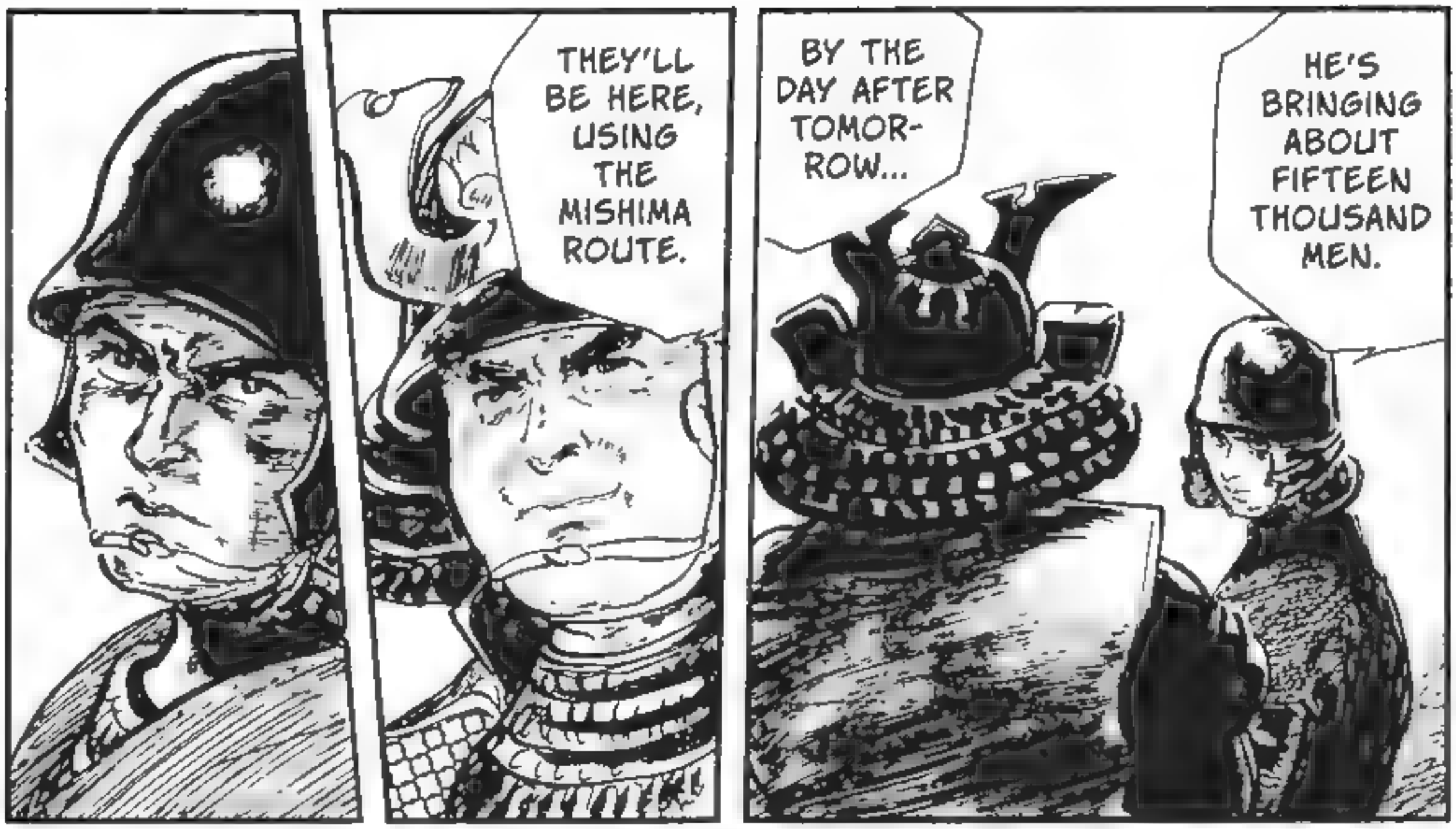
厥誰統主依來淨土

ALL RIGHT. SURROUND THE CASTLE AND PUSH, PUSH, AND PUSH.




BUBU
BAIBAI!
ZU
DO
DO
DO
DO

I HEARD KATSUYORI IS HEADED THIS WAY WITH AN ARMY.
HE MEANS TO RESIST AT ALL COSTS UNTIL REINFORCE-MENTS ARRIVE!
HOW DOGGED OKABE NAGANORI IS!


THEY'LL BE HERE, USING THE MISHIMA ROUTE.
BY THE DAY AFTER TOMOR-ROW...
HE'S BRINGING ABOUT FIFTEEN THOUSAND MEN.

ZAAAAA
TRUM
TRUM
TRUM
TRUM

THERE ARE OVER TEN THOU-SAND MEN!

IT'S HŌJŌ'S ARMY!

DAMN YOU, UJIMASA!

URK...

YAHHHHH

PULL BACK!!

TAKEDA KATSUYORI TURNED AWAY BECAUSE HŌJŌ STOOD IN HIS WAY IN MISHIMA.

IF IT WAS SHINGEN, HE WOULD'VE WEIGHED BETWEEN UESUGI AND HŌJŌ AND ALWAYS PLACED HIMSELF IN A DOMINANT POSITION.

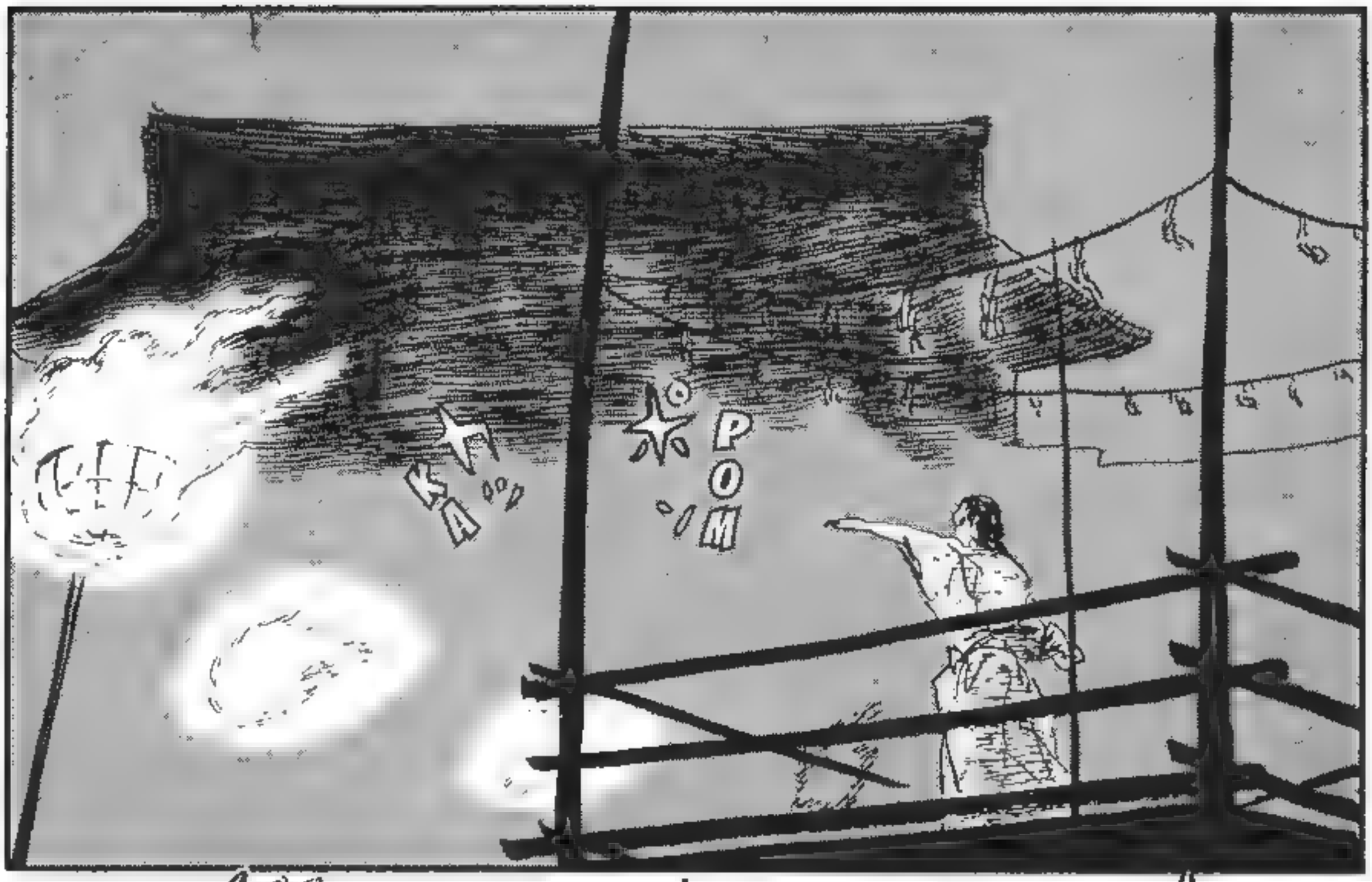
HE DESERTED TAKATENJIN CASTLE...

TOKUGAWA-*DONO*, WE'D LIKE TO ASK YOU A FAVOR.

WE HEAR THERE IS A RENOWNED DANCER NAMED KŌWAKA YOSANDAYŪ AMONG YOU. WE PRAY YOU'LL ALLOW HIM TO DANCE FOR US BEFORE WE LEAVE THIS WORLD.

ACKNOWLEDGED AND AGREED!

WHY DON'T YOU DANCE THE TAKADATE.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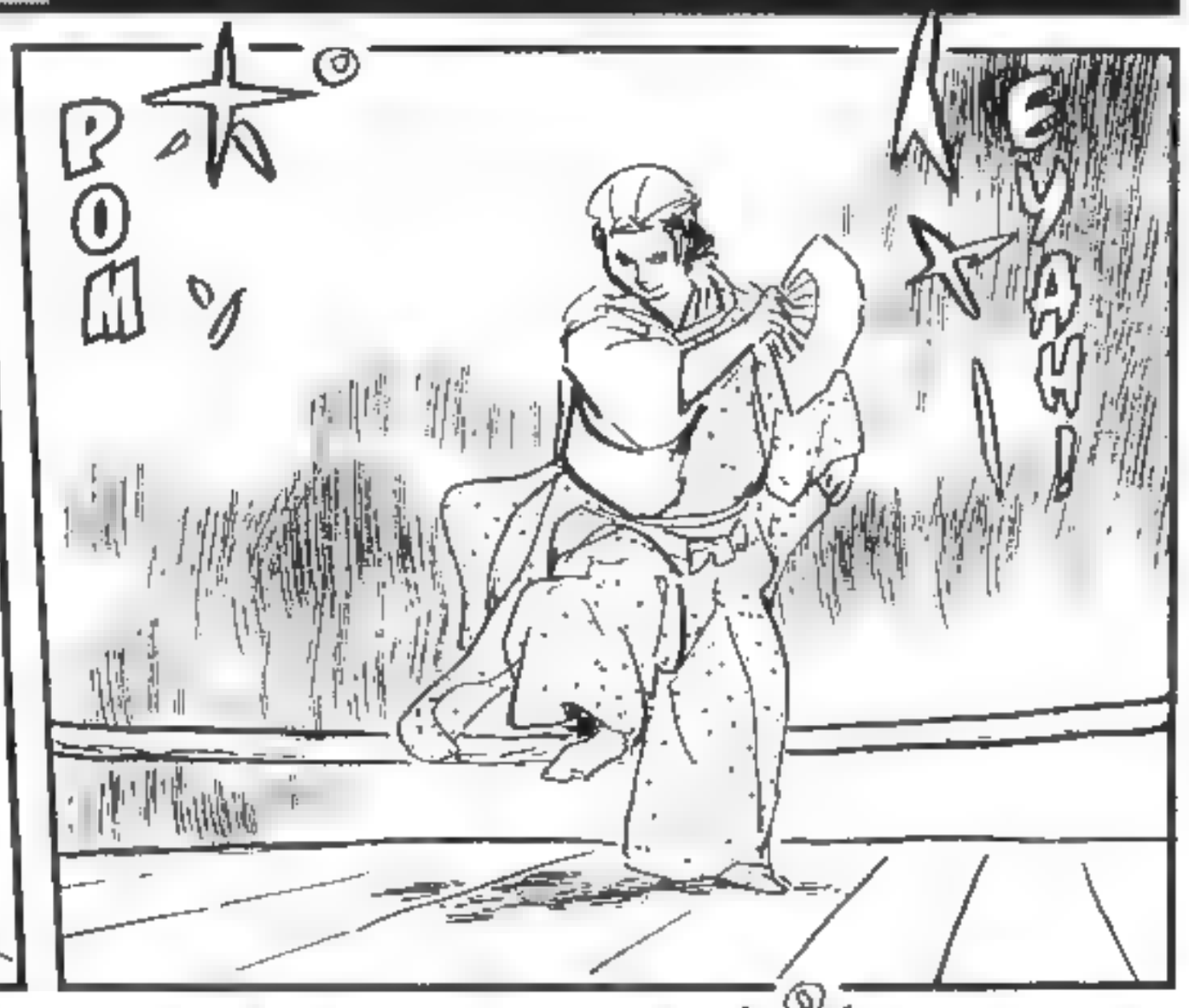
POM
POM

POM


POM
YAH!

POM
POM

NIGHT OF
MARCH 22ND.
NINTH YEAR
OF TENSHŌ
(1581 A.D.)

ON MARCH 23RD OF THE SAME YEAR, TAKATENJIN CASTLE FELL. OKABE NAGANORI AND THE GARRISON, TOTALING OVER SIX HUNDRED MEN, ALL DIED IN BATTLE.

KATSUYORI ORDERED SANADA MASAYUKI TO BUILD A NEW CASTLE IN NIRASAKI, LOCATED NORTHWEST OF KOFUCHŪ.

HAMAMATSU CASTLE.

PEOPLE ARE THE STONE WALLS AND CASTLES...

THE SITE THEY CHOSE IS ON A PLATEAU CALLED SHICHIRIIWA ABOUT SIX *JŌ* HIGH. AT ITS BASE RUNS THE KAMANASHIGAWA RIVER TO THE WEST AND SHIOKAWA RIVER TO THE EAST, MAKING IT A STRATEGICALLY IMPORTANT LOCATION.

THAT'S BECAUSE HE BELIEVED THAT WAR IS TO ATTACK AND DEFEND, AND THAT IT IS THE PEOPLE WHO DO SO.

I BELIEVE THAT SHINGEN'S TSUTSUJIGASAKI PALACE IN KOFUCHŪ HARDLY HAD THE SHAPE OF A FORTRESS.

NOBUNAGA-*DONO* WILL NEVER PASS UP THIS OPPORTUNITY.

...DEAD.

THE FLAG MARK OF *FŪRIN-KAZAN* IS...

HE DID SO OUT OF HIS FEAR OF BEING DEFEATED.

DESPITE THIS, KATSUYORI BUILT A CASTLE.

ON NEW YEAR'S DAY, TENTH YEAR OF TENSHŌ (1582 A.D.), THE TAKEDA GENERAL KISO YOSHIMASA SURRENDERED TO ODA. KISO YOSHIMASA WAS A MEMBER OF THE ILLUSTRIOUS TAKEDA FAMILY AND HAD TAKEN KATSUYORI'S SISTER AS HIS WIFE. HIS SURRENDER ENRAGED KATSUYORI, CAUSING HIM TO LEAD FIFTEEN THOUSAND MEN TO KISO.

TRUM

TRUM

TRUM

TRUM

TRUM

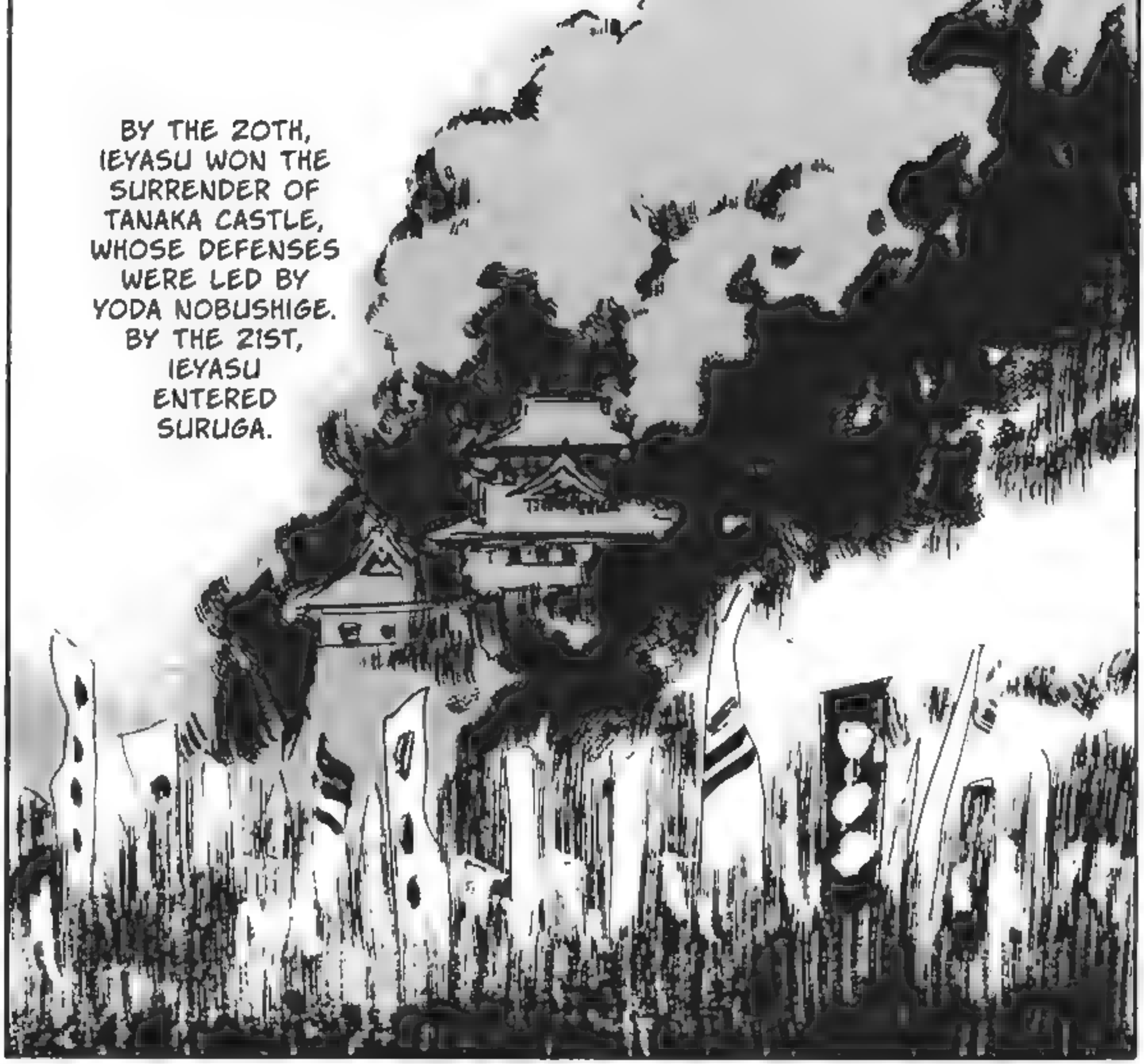
NOBUNAGA FROM KISO...
SEEING THIS AS THE PERFECT OPPORTUNITY, NOBUNAGA, TOGETHER WITH IEYASU, MUSTERED THEIR TROOPS TO SUBJUGATE TAKEDA.

AND HŌJŌ FROM KANTŌ, ACTING IN CONCERT WITH THE ODA-TOKUGAWA ALLIANCE, ADVANCED THEIR ARMIES INTO KAI.

IEYASU FROM SURUGA...

UPON NOBUNAGA'S REQUEST, IEYASU LEFT HAMAMATSU ON FEBRUARY 18TH.

BY THE 20TH, IEYASU WON THE SURRENDER OF TANAKA CASTLE, WHOSE DEFENSES WERE LED BY YODA NOBUSHIGE. BY THE 21ST, IEYASU ENTERED SURUGA.



I'M DISMOUNTING.

THIS IS SURUGA.

HM. WE'RE IN SURUGA. WE'RE HERE, INDEED.

MILORD, WE ENTERED SURUGA ONLY A MOMENT AGO...

TAKEDA TOOK IT FROM IMAGAWA, AND NOW I'M THE ONE WHO STANDS ON ITS SOIL BY MY OWN POWER.

STOMP

STOMP

STOMP

STOMP

NOT AS A HOSTAGE BUT AS A WARLORD, I STAND ON ITS SOIL.

THEY SING OF BLUE SPRING, VERMILION SUMMER, WHITE AUTUMN, AND BLACK WINTER IN POEMS. RIGHT NOW IS VERMILION SUMMER OF MY LIFE.

I SPENT ALL MY YOUTH, MY BLUE SPRING, HERE.

NOW THAT I'VE RETURNED TO SUNPU IN VERMILION SUMMER, I HOPE I'LL LIVE HERE UNTIL BLACK WINTER.

IMAGAWA, TAKEDA, AND TOKUGAWA. WE'VE FOUGHT OVER THIS LAND FOR AGES.

STOMP

STOMP

STOMP

STOMP

ODA MAY HAVE SUGGESTED IT, BUT STILL, WHY DID KISO YOSHIMASA BETRAY TAKEDA?

"IF IEYASU-*SAMA* IS AGREEABLE, I'D LIKE TO HAVE AN AUDIENCE WITH HIM," HE SAYS.

ANAYAMA NOBUKIMI-*DONO* OF EJIRI CASTLE IN SUNPU HAS EXPRESSED INTEREST IN SURRENDERING TO US.

おう！
OH!

それは…
THAT'S...

うむ。
HMM.

よしっ！
GOOD!

YES, SIR. I BELIEVE HE IS LITERALLY A CORNERSTONE OF TAKEDA...

ANAYAMA? HIS MOTHER IS SHINGEN'S SISTER, WHICH MAKES HIM KATSUYORI'S COUSIN.

WHY ?!!

WHY ?!

WHY ?!!!

KATSUTOYO IS SHINGEN'S NEPHEW. SHŌYŌKEN NOBUKADO IS SHIN-GEN'S...

WHY?

TAKEDA KATSUTOYO AND TAKEDA NOBUKADO DEFECTED FROM KATSU-YORI.

I HAVE A REPORT, SIR!

HOW CAN THEY WATCH THE DEMISE OF TAKEDA WITHOUT A FIGHT?!

...BROTHER!!

HOW CAN THEY DO THAT?!

PHEW...

NOBUMORI-*SAMA* MET A HEROIC DEATH, AND TAKATŌ CASTLE FELL IN THE END.

DEFENDING TAKATŌ CASTLE, KATSUYORI'S BROTHER, NISHINA NOBUMORI-*SAMA*, CLASHED VIOLENTLY WITH ODA NOBUTADA-*SAMA*.

I HAVE A REPORT, SIR!

WILL IT BE THE SAME WHEN I GO DOWN...?

BUT... WHY ARE THERE DESERTERS?

HMM.

MILORD, MAY I SPEAK OF THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN YOU AND KATSUYORI-*DONO*?

THERE'S NO RESEMBLANCE IN THE WAY YOU WERE BROUGHT UP.

I BEG YOUR PARDON, SIR, BUT...

WHAT IS IT? TELL ME.

BE-TWEEN ME AND KATSU-YORI?

HE GREW UP PAMPERED AND CARE-FREE.

KATSUYORI-*DONO* WAS BORN AS AN HEIR TO THE GREAT CLAN OF TAKEDA.

...!

...

...

UNLIKE YOU, MILORD, WHO SPENT YOUR TENDER AGE AS A HOSTAGE, HE PROBABLY FINDS IT DIFFICULT TO UNDERSTAND OR TO BE CONSIDERATE OF OTHERS.

TOKUGAWA HAS ALWAYS HAD TO WORK FOR ANYONE TO LISTEN.

TAKEDA DIDN'T NEED TO DO ANY-THING TO HAVE THEIR GENERALS OBEY.

HMM...

THINGS HAVE CHANGED. BUT KATSUYORI-*DONO* IS PROBABLY UNAWARE OF THIS.

HE MUST LIVE UP TO HIS FATHER'S STANDARD.

AND TRY TO SURPASS HIM.

IF I MAY ADD MORE...

KATSUYORI-*DONO'S* MISFORTUNE IS HAVING HAD SUCH A GREAT MAN AS HIS FATHER.

...
...

THIS HAS MADE HIM ANXIOUS, LEADING HIM TO LOSE BATTLE AFTER BATTLE, WHICH DROVE HIS COLLEAGUES AWAY.

...?

HEH...
HEH HEH...
HEH...

I HAD NO GREAT FATHER, NO TERRITORY, AND NO ARMY.

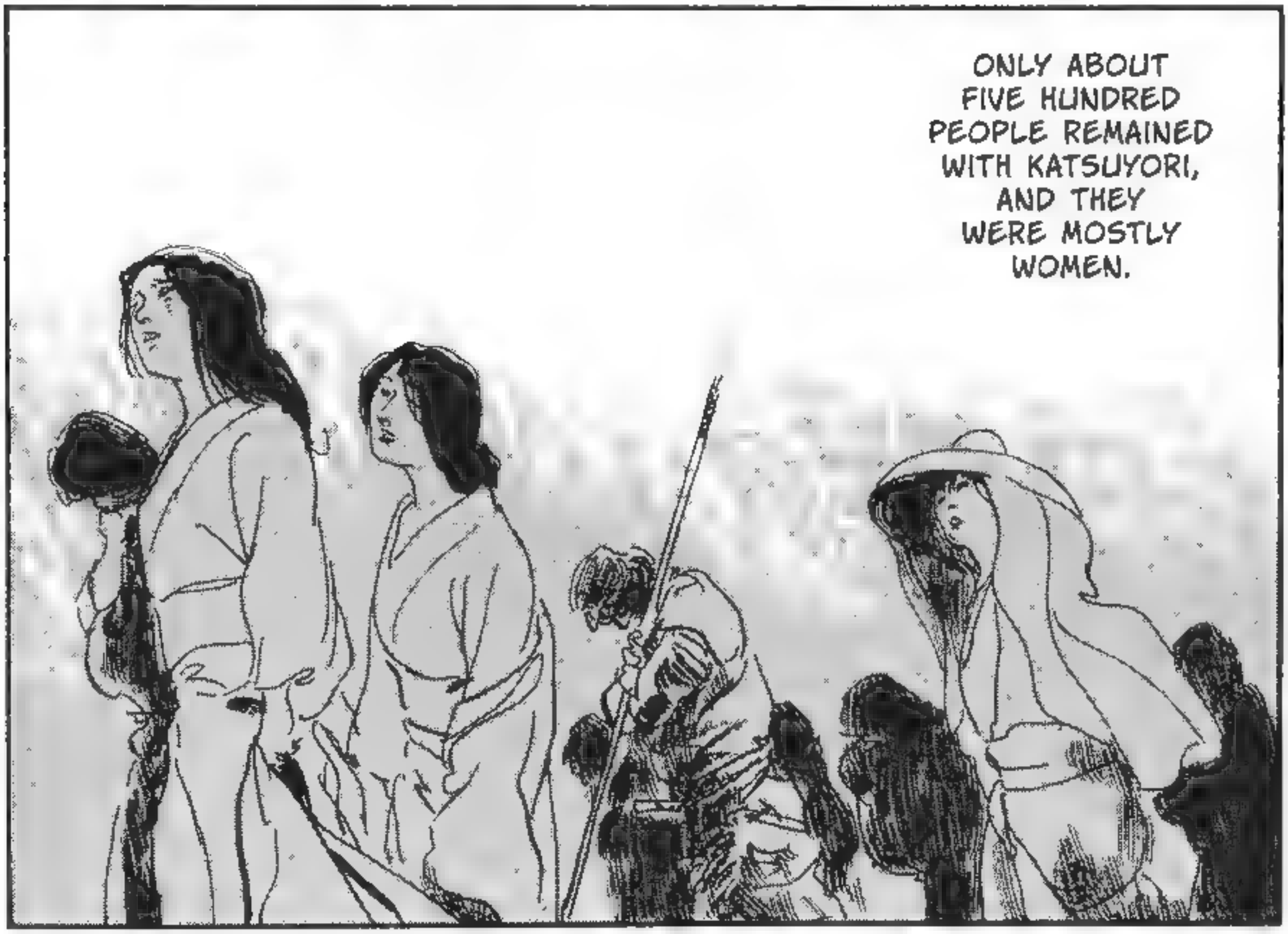
THAT'S WHY I MADE IT THIS FAR.

SO, HANZŌ, I'M THE FORTUNATE ONE.

FINE. HANZŌ, IT MAY BE TRUE INDEED.

MILORD...

AT LONG LAST, KATSUYORI SET FIRE TO SHINPU CASTLE AS IT FELL.
TENTH YEAR OF TENSHŌ (1582 A.D.)


ONLY ABOUT FIVE HUNDRED PEOPLE REMAINED WITH KATSUYORI, AND THEY WERE MOSTLY WOMEN.

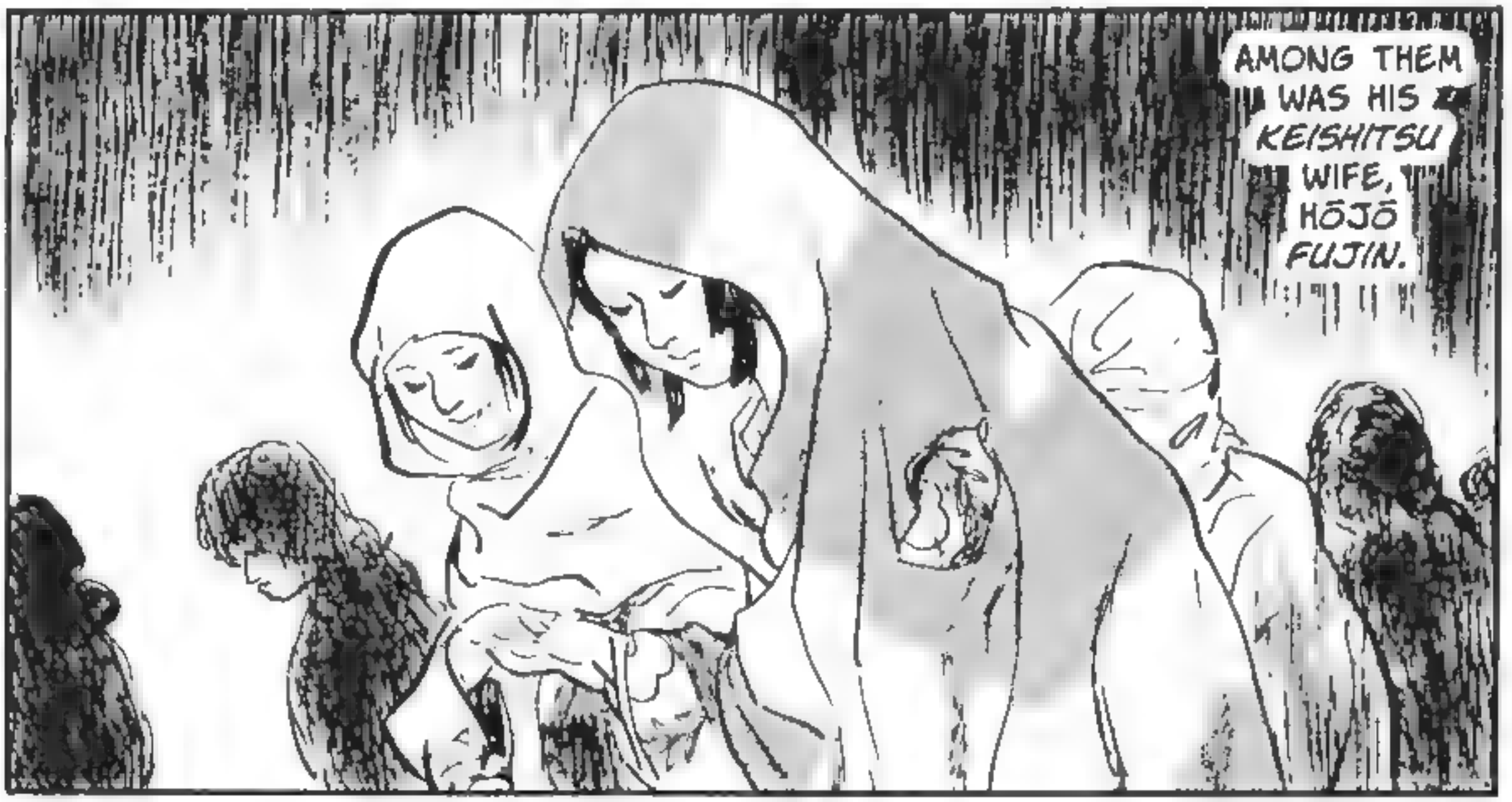
OYAMADA NOBUSHIGE, THE MAN WHOM KATSUYORI HAD COUNTED ON AS HIS LAST HOPE, TURNED AGAINST HIM AS WELL.

ON MARCH 4TH, THEY SPENT THE NIGHT AT DAIZENJI TEMPLE IN KASHIO. HOW MANY RAN AWAY THAT NIGHT IS UNKNOWN.

HAVING BEEN BETRAYED BY HIS RIGHT-HAND MAN, THE STALWART OF TAKEDA SINCE THE TIME OF SHINGEN...

KATSUYORI GAVE UP ALL HOPE AND PREPARED TO DIE ON MT. TENMOKU.

BY THAT TIME, JUST A LITTLE OVER A HUNDRED PEOPLE REMAINED WITH KATSUYORI.


AMONG THEM WAS HIS *KEISHITSU* WIFE, HŌJŌ *FUJIN*.

AS MARCH 11TH DAWNED, HALFWAY UP MT. TENMOKU, ALL THEY COULD DO WAS TO WAIT FOR ODA'S TAKIGAWA KAZUMASU TO ATTACK.

PICKING FLOWERS.

WHAT ARE YOU DOING?

FUNERAL FLOWERS, EH...

...
...

I'M SURE YOUR BROTHER, HŌJŌ UJIMASA, WILL GIVE YOU ASYLUM.

...
...

WHY DON'T YOU SEEK REFUGE IN HŌJŌ?

YOU DID A GOOD JOB RAISING NOBUKATSU AS MY SECOND WIFE.

YOU WERE FOURTEEN WHEN YOU MARRIED INTO TAKEDA, FIVE YEARS AGO.

SNAP

FLEE TO HŌJŌ.

YOUR ROLE AS HIS MOTHER ENDED TODAY.

I WONDER IF YOU KNOW THE NAME OF THIS FLOWER.

MY MOTHER TOLD ME IT'S THE FLOWER OF HUSBAND AND WIFE.

IT ALWAYS BLOOMS IN PAIRS LIKE THIS.

IT'S CALLED *NIRINSŌ*.

...

...

...!

WHEN THE STEM IS PICKED, THE TWO FLOWERS DIE TOGETHER.

THE FLOWER OF HUSBAND AND WIFE...

AND HERE THEY ARE, A LARGE COLONY OF THEM IN FULL BLOOM.

I HEAR THESE FLOWERS BLOOM ONLY IN SHADED AREAS DEEP IN THE MOUNTAINS IN EARLY SPRING.

...
...

IT FEELS LIKE MY LATE MOTHER IS TELLING ME TO DIE WITH YOU.

ON MARCH 12TH, THE TAKEDA CLAN PERISHED ON MT. TENMOKU.

YAHHHH

EVEN THOUGH IT WAS EARLY SPRING, THEY SAY IT WAS A COLD, WINDY DAY.

JUNE 1ST, TENTH YEAR OF TENSHŌ (1582 A.D.) FOUR O'CLOCK IN THE AFTER-NOON.

ブオー BUOOO

ブオー BUOOO

ブオー BUOOO

ブオー BUOOO

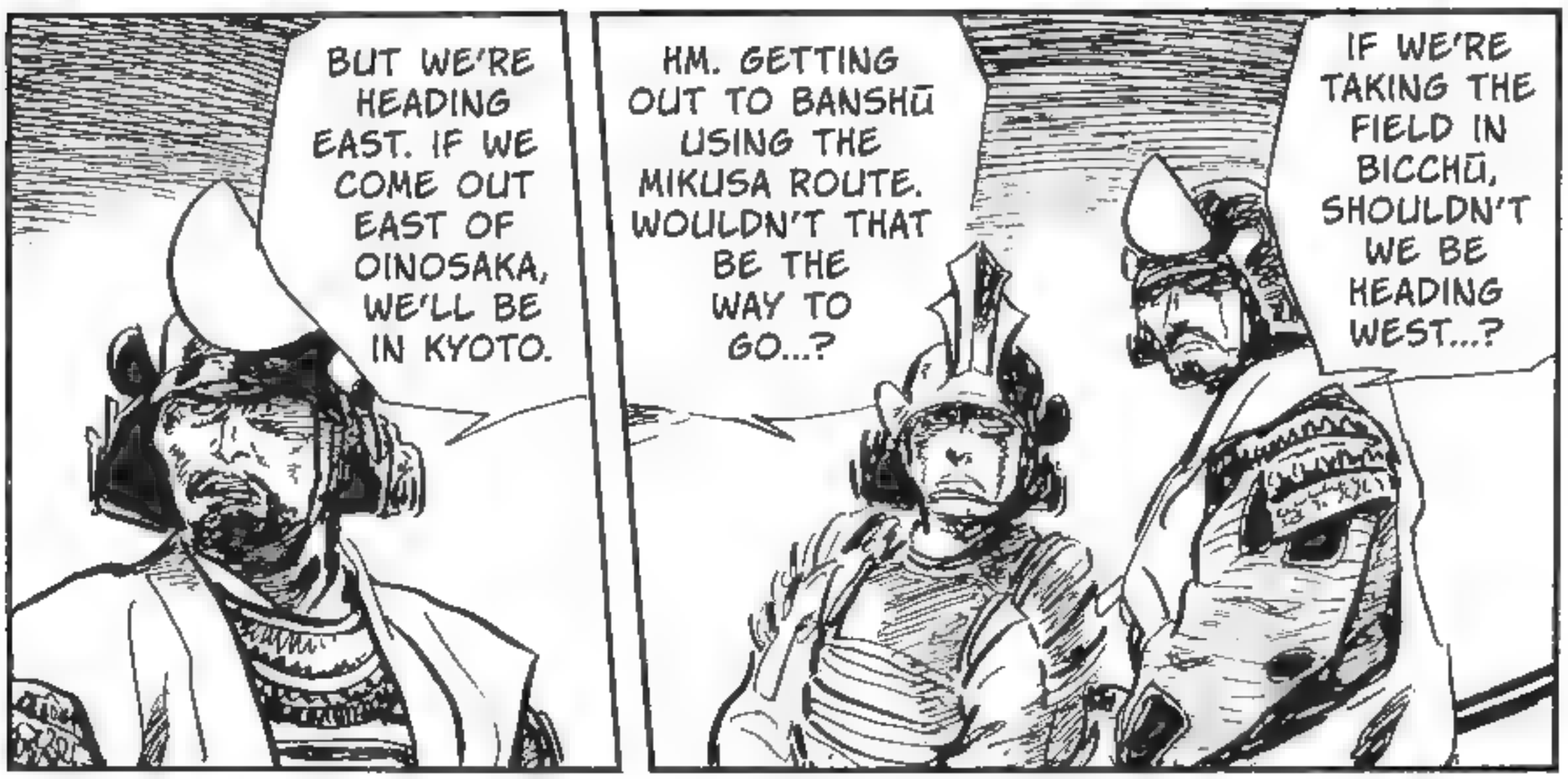
ブオー BUOOO

MOST LIKELY. HE WAS QUITE GRATEFUL FOR YOUR KIND RECEPTION, MILORD.

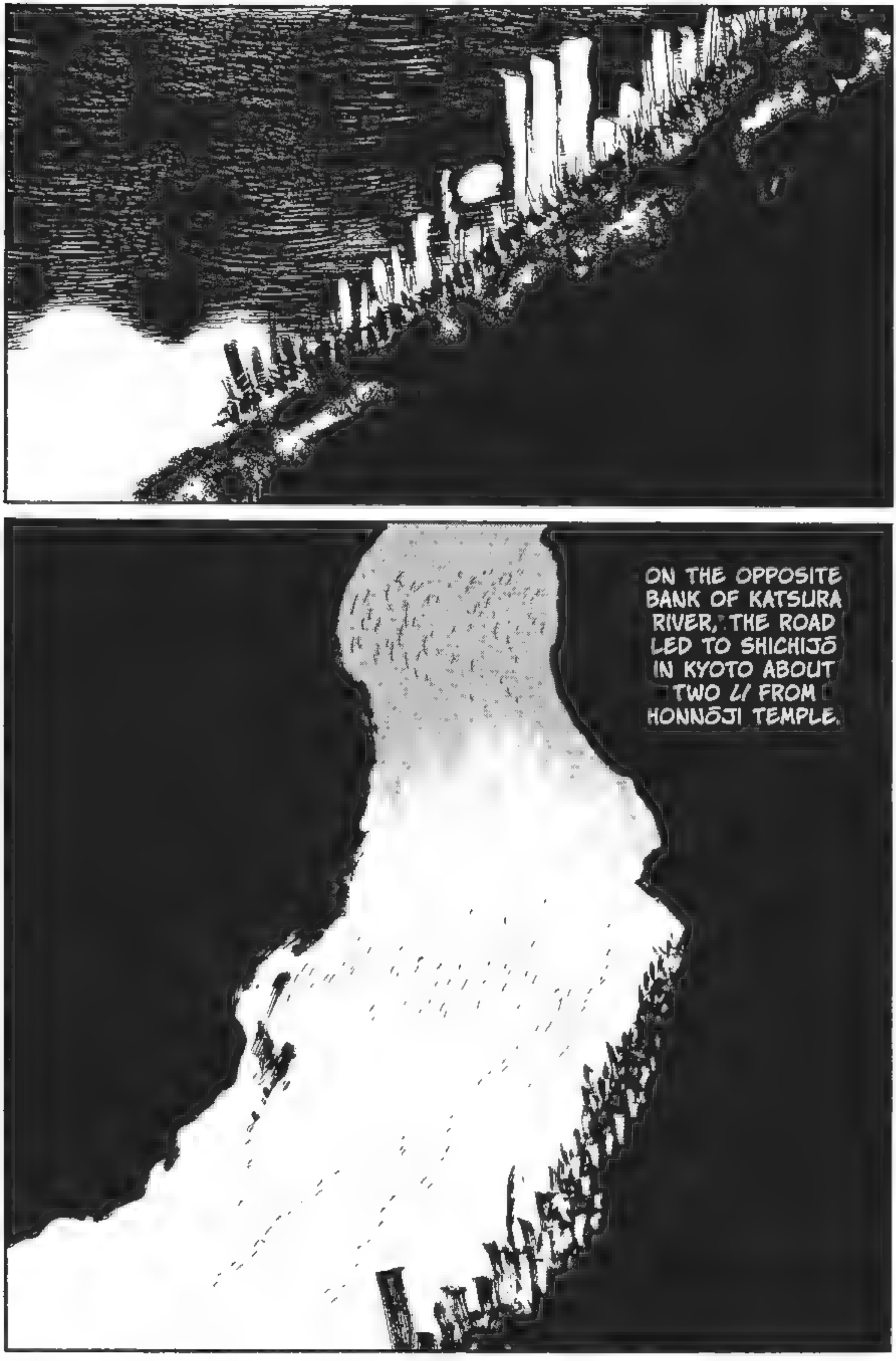
I GUESS IEYASU-*DONO* IS STILL IN SAKAI IN SENSHŪ.

HM.
AND HE DID MENTION TAKING THIS OPPORTUNITY TO TOUR SAKAI IN LEISURE.

SAME DAY. KAMEYAMA IN TANBA. TEN O'CLOCK AT NIGHT.


BUT WE'RE HEADING EAST. IF WE COME OUT EAST OF OINOSAKA, WE'LL BE IN KYOTO.
HM. GETTING OUT TO BANSHŪ USING THE MIKUSA ROUTE. WOULDN'T THAT BE THE WAY TO GO...?
IF WE'RE TAKING THE FIELD IN BICCHŪ, SHOULDN'T WE BE HEADING WEST...?

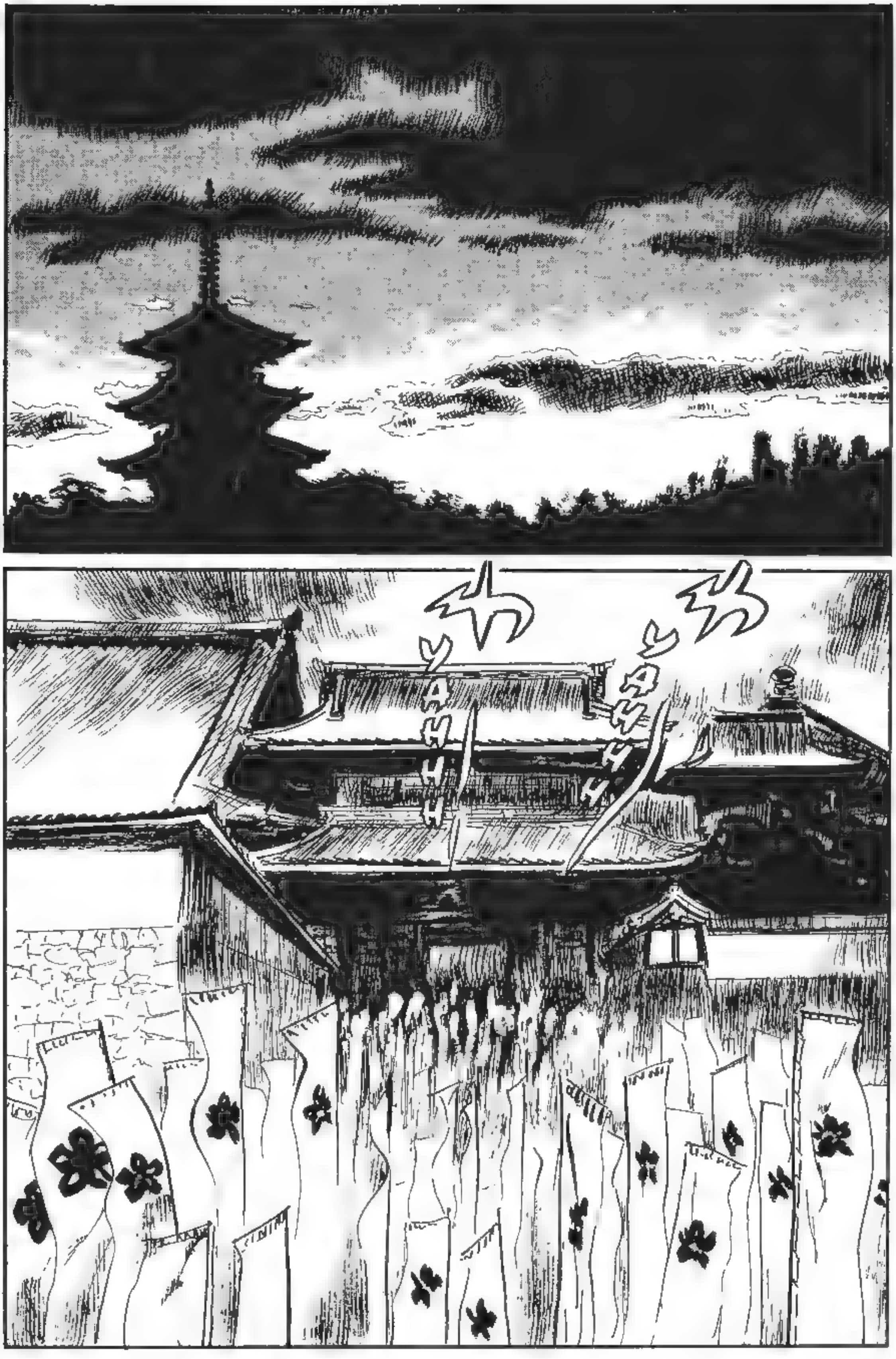
KUTSUKAKE, HALFWAY UP THE OINOSAKA PASS.


ON THE OPPOSITE BANK OF KATSURA RIVER, THE ROAD LED TO SHICHIJŌ IN KYOTO ABOUT TWO LI FROM HONNŌJI TEMPLE.

MUSKETEERS, CUT YOUR MATCHES TO 1 *SHAKU* 5 *SUN*, LIGHT FIVE EACH, AND ARRANGE THEM WITH THE LIT ENDS UPSIDE DOWN.

CUT OFF AND THROW AWAY THE HORSES' SHOES. FOOT SOLDIERS, PUT ON FRESH *ASHINAKA WARAJI!*

MY ENEMY IS IN HONNŌJI TEMPLE.


AH
AH

TRUM

TRUM

TRUM

A GREAT MANY TROOPS SURROUND US AND ARE ABOUT TO ATTACK!

THE FLAG MARK... IT'S A LIGHT BLUE BELL-FLOWER!

ORAN, WHAT'S GOING ON?

IF HE'S TURNED ON ME, NOTHING CAN BE DONE. MY LIFE ENDS HERE.

IT'S MITSUHIDE, EH?

GET THE WOMEN AND CHILDREN OUT.

MITSUHIDE IS THE KIND OF MAN WHO PREPARES TWO, THREE... NO, SEVERAL STEPS AHEAD!

YOU FOOL!

P... PLEASE FLEE!

HE WON'T BE ABLE TO HOLD MY HEAD OR STEP ON IT.

LEAVING NO TRACE OF MYSELF...THAT'S THE ONLY BLOW I CAN DELIVER TO HIM.

AND, ORAN, FETCH ME SOME OIL.

THAT BASTARD MITSUHIDE!!

HA HA HA HA

HA HA HA HA

JUST GO!
SPLOSH
I'M HERE!

URK!
!

MILORD!!

TUMBLED FROM HIGH AND FELL ON MY BACK, OH YES!

POOF

BEFORE DAWN ON JUNE 2ND, TENTH YEAR OF TENSHŌ (1582 A.D.), ODA NOBUNAGA DIED AT AGE FORTY-NINE.

TAKING THE OPPORTUNITY, HE ALSO WENT AHEAD AND VISITED SAKAI.

AFTER SPENDING SIX DAYS THERE, IEYASU LEFT FOR KYOTO ON MAY 21ST.

IN MID-MAY, IEYASU VISITED NOBUNAGA IN AZUCHI TO EXPRESS HIS GRATITUDE.

AFTER DEFEATING TAKEDA IN MARCH OF THE TENTH YEAR OF TENSHŌ (1582 A.D.), NOBUNAGA HAD REWARDED IEYASU WITH THE PROVINCE OF SURUGA, A FORMER TAKEDA TERRITORY.

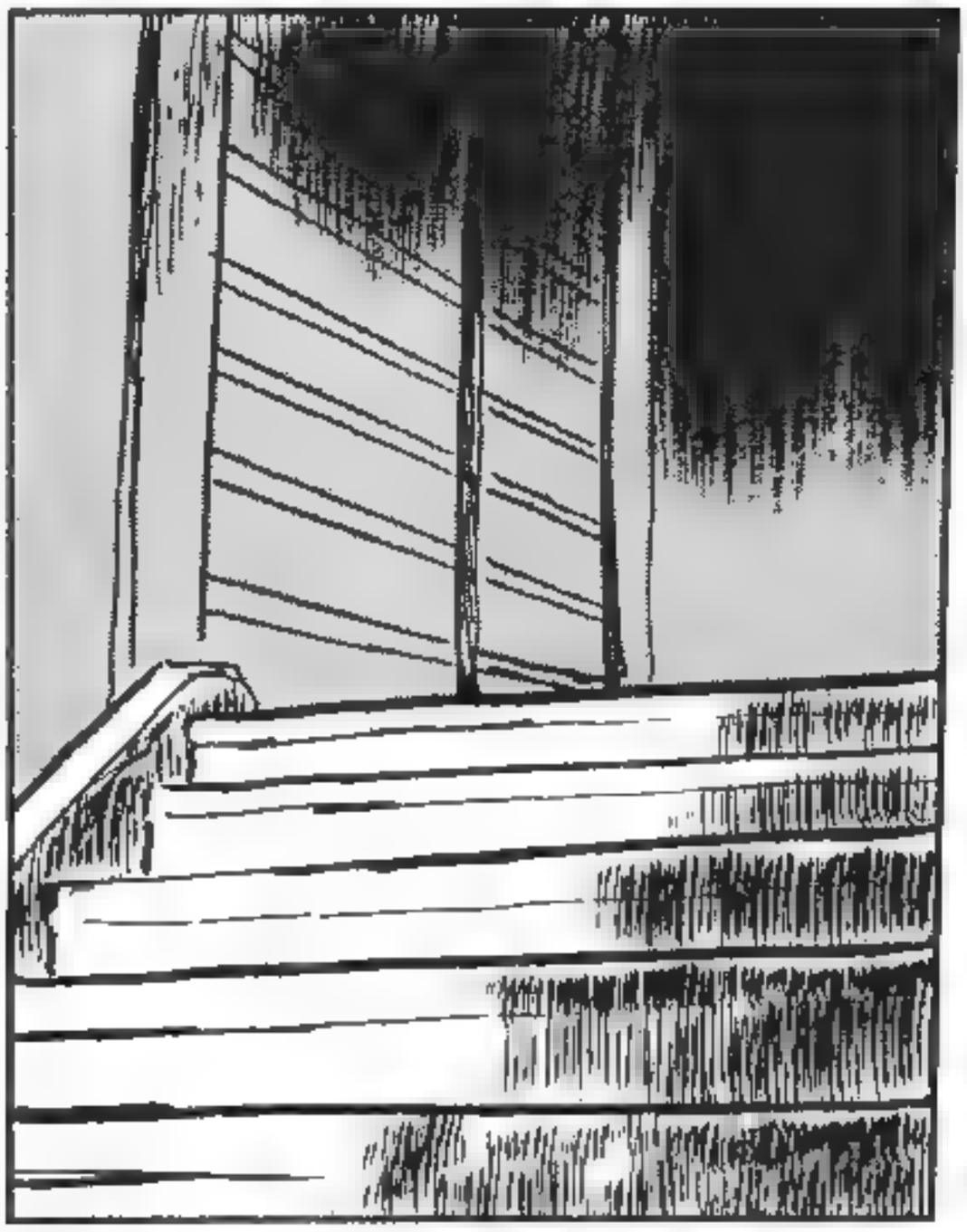
UNTIL JUNE 1ST, MATSUI YŪKAN, IMAI SŌKYŪ, AND TSUDA SŌGYŪ ENTERTAINED IEYASU.

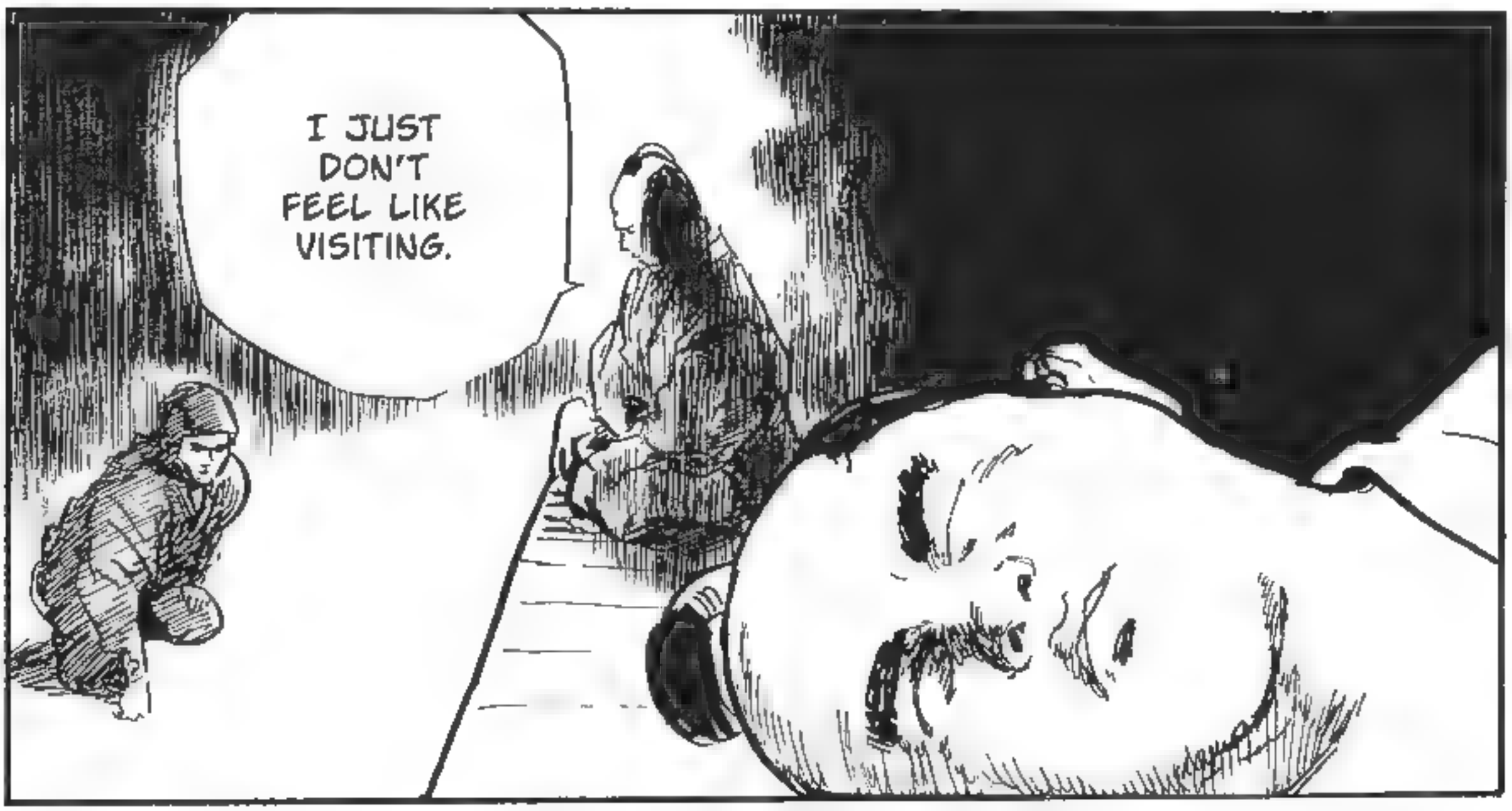
WSK

WSK

NATURALLY, IEYASU DID NOT BRING ALONG A LARGE NUMBER OF BODYGUARDS. LESS THAN THIRTY MEN ACCOMPANIED HIM.

HM?!




I JUST DON'T FEEL LIKE VISITING.

IF I BRING ALONG AN ARMY, THAT WILL BE VERY RUDE. I'M AWARE THAT THE SMALLER MY ENTOURAGE, THE HAPPIER NOBUNAGA-*DONO* WILL BE...
I KNOW I MUST GO AND THANK HIM, BUT TAKEDA'S SURVIVORS KEEP CAUSING PROB-LEMS EVERY-WHERE.

I COUNT ON YOU, HANZŌ.

PLEASE DO NOT WORRY, MILORD. WE'LL BE WITH YOU UNDETECTED AND WE WILL PROVIDE UN-BREACHABLE PROTEC-TION.

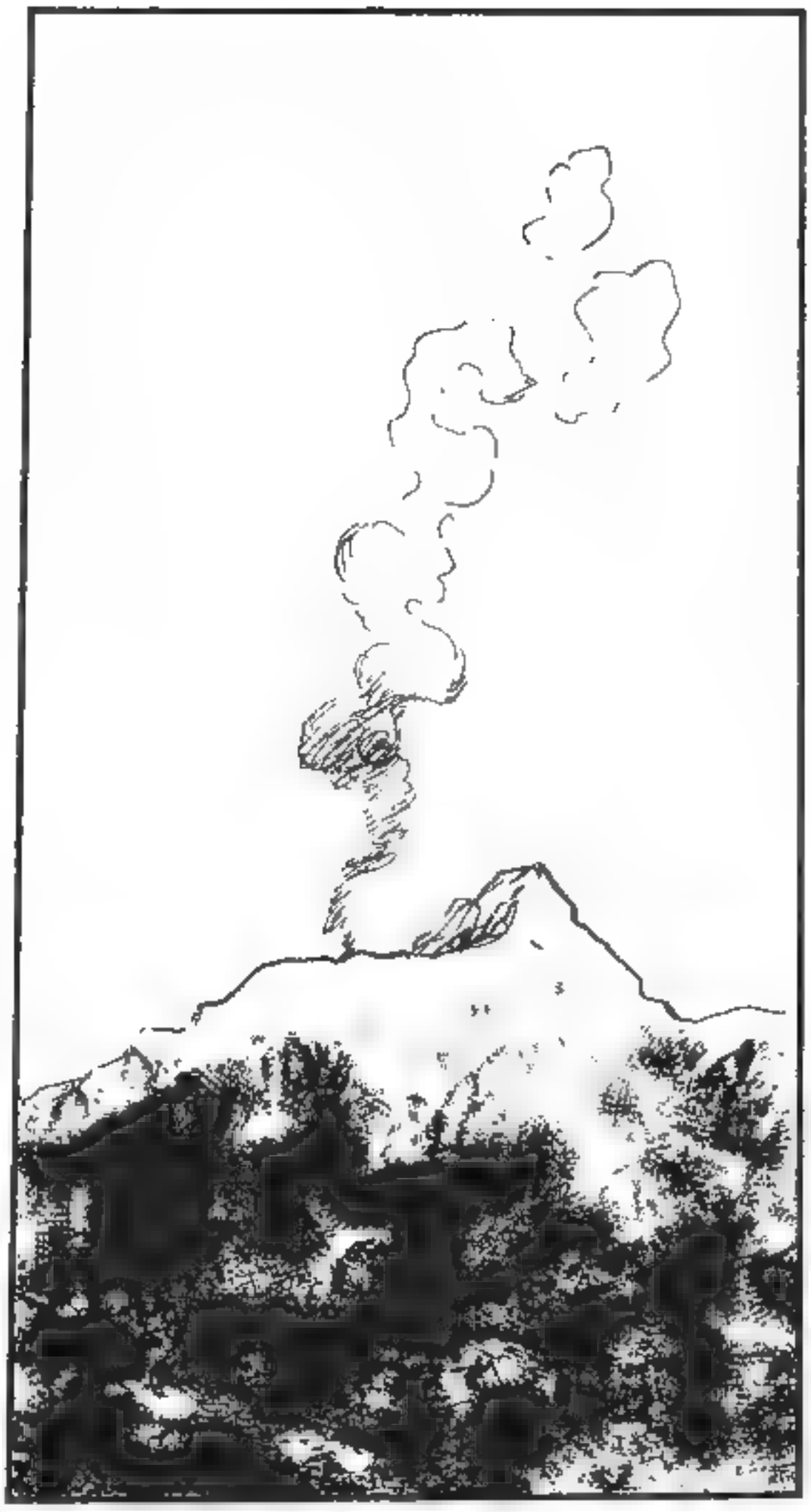
I'M HERE.

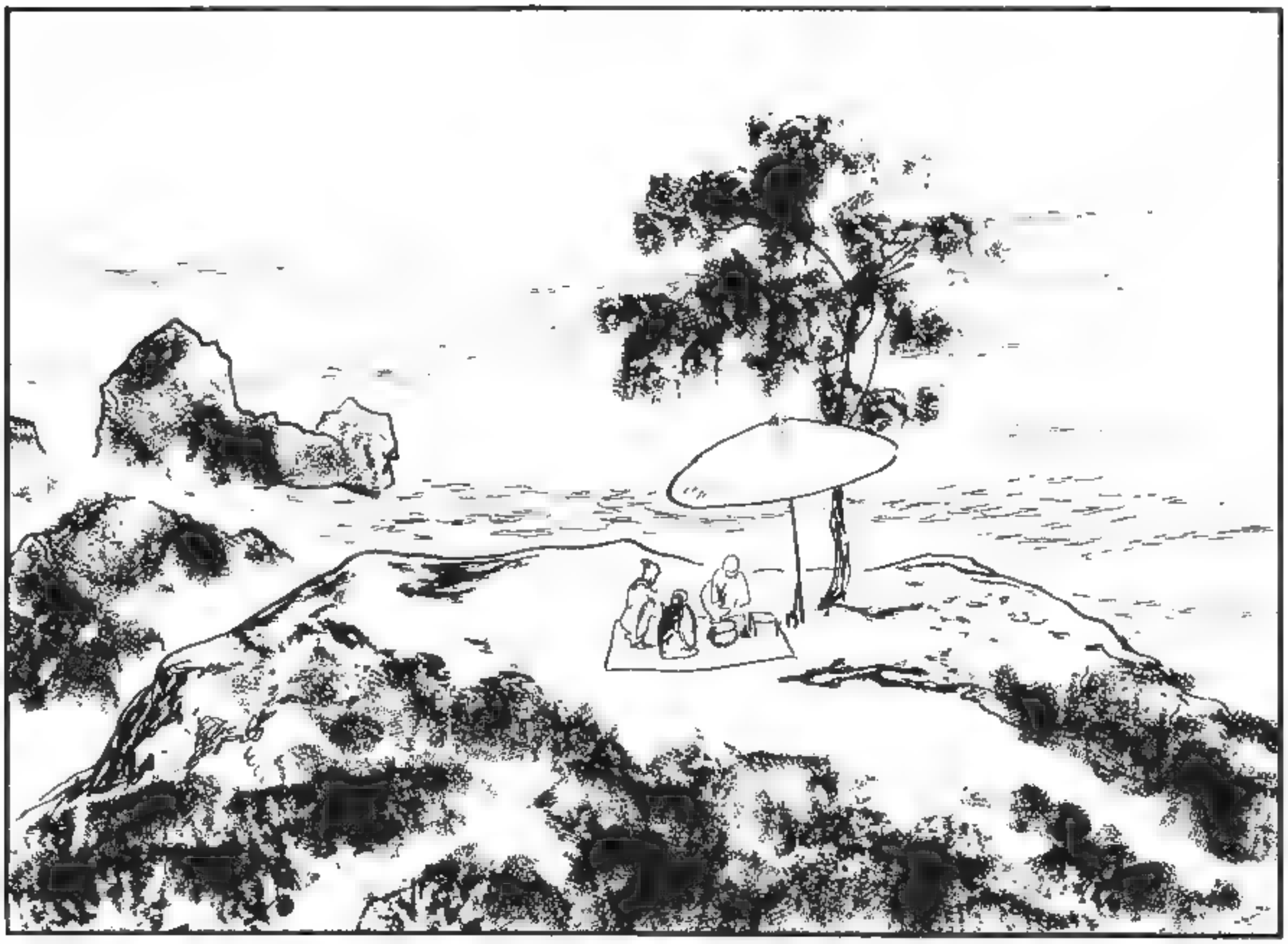
HA... HANZŌ!

ER... NAH... NOTHING.

PHEW

IS ANYTHING WRONG?





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I NEED TO RELIEVE MYSELF.

WHAT...?

IT'S BEEN REPORTED THAT SOMETHING ODD TOOK PLACE IN KYOTO.

YOU MUST LEAVE HERE IMMEDI-ATELY.

I'VE YET TO FIND OUT THE DETAILS, BUT THE SMOKE MEANS OMINOUS AND URGENT.

BUT THEN WE'LL BE EVEN CLOSER TO KYOTO.

ONCE WE REACH MT. IIMORI IN KAWACHI PROVINCE, WE CAN FIND OUT WHAT HAP-PENED.

I'M SURE ONE OF MY MEN IS ON HORSEBACK RIGHT NOW, RUSHING FOR MT. IIMORI WITH THE NEWS.

WHAT IS THIS TERRIBLE NEWS?

WHAT THE HECK HAPPENED... IN KYOTO...?

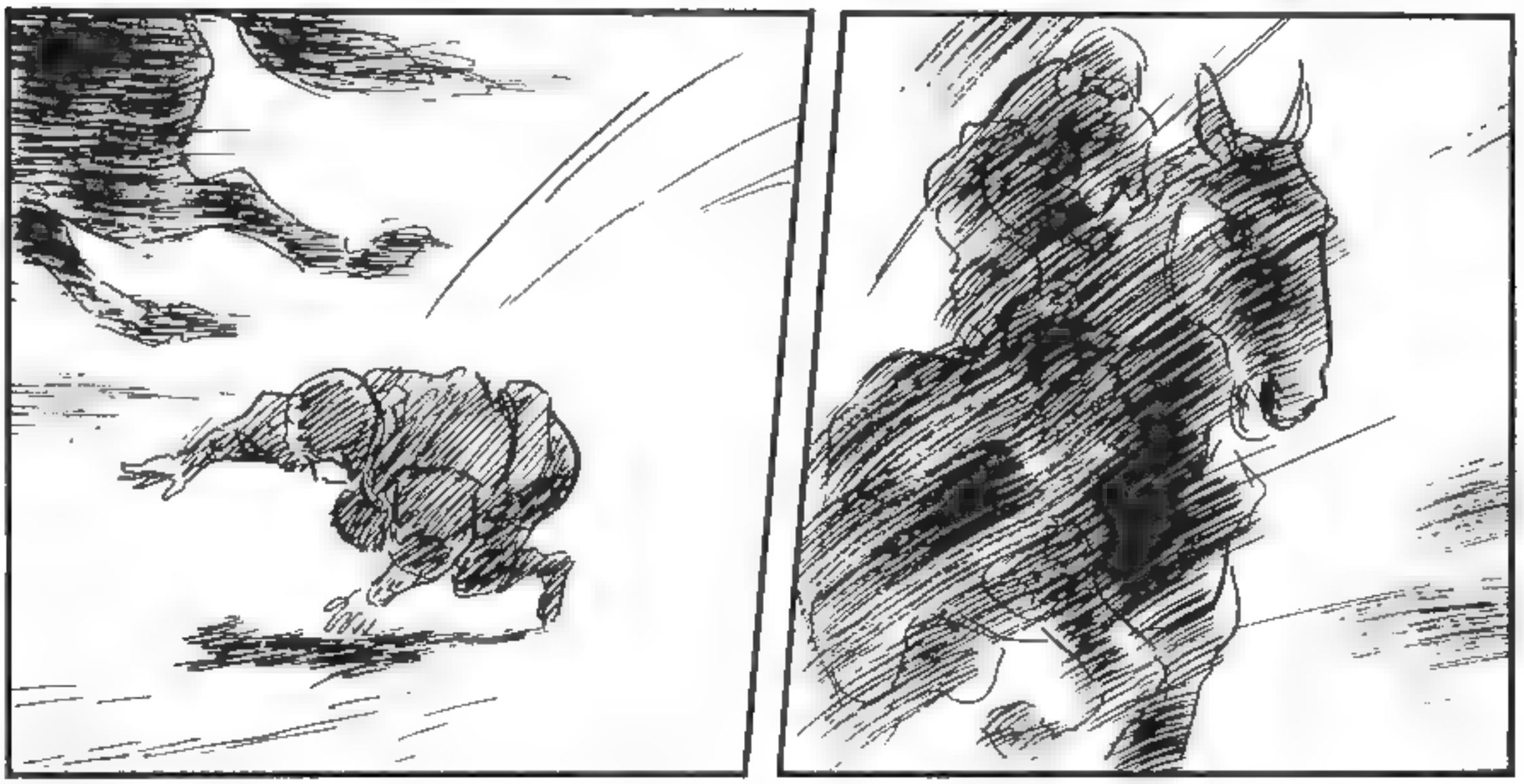
AND THE FASTEST ROUTE IS TO TRAVEL FROM MT. IIMORI TO UJITAWARA, PAST THE MOUNTAINS OF IGA DOWN INTO SHIRAHAMA OF ISE.

WHATEVER IT IS, YOU MUST RE-TURN HOME. THAT'S OUR TOP PRIORITY.

KRMPT
KRMPT
KRMPT

TRUM
TRUM
TRUM

POK
POK
POK
POK



YEK

BEFORE DAWN TODAY HE ATTACKED HONNŌJI TEMPLE.

AK... AKECHI MITSUHIDE... REVOLT-ED!!

AKECHI'S FORCES ARE DRAWING NEAR. THEY MEAN TO KILL YOU, MILORD.

GAK!

NOBUNAGA-*SAMA* KILLED HIMSELF BY OIL AND FIRE.

HE STRUCK ODA AND NOW HE'LL STRIKE TOKUGAWA, TOO...? MITSUHIDE... HE'S COMING...?

NOB... NOBUNAGA-*DONO*... KILLED... BY MITSU-HIDE...

MY...MY KNEES... SO WEAK... CAN'T STAND...

UM...

YOU KNOW, IT'S NOT UNUSUAL.

MY KNEES DIDN'T GIVE WAY BECAUSE I WAS SCARED. I JUST FELT LIKE...A ROPE...THAT BOUND ME...SUDDENLY CUT LOOSE...

HELP ME GET UP!

ER...NO. WHEN TWO MEN STRUGGLE UP A STEEP MOUNTAIN-SIDE...

THEY ARE BOUND TOGETHER... BUT IF THE LEAD MAN FALLS AND THE ROPE IS SEVERED, THE OTHER MAN MUST NOW CLIMB ON HIS OWN, HUGGING THE ROCKS WITH ALL HIS MIGHT.

WHEN CLIMBING DOWN A CLIFF, ONE MAN HOLDS A ROPE IN HIS HANDS WHILE THE OTHER TIES IT AROUND HIS WAIST AND DESCENDS...

I'M NOT GOING TO FALL. NEVER!

THAT'S HOW I FELT.

ON JUNE 2ND, THEY LEFT SAKAI.

WE LEFT UJITAWARA AND ARE NOW IN SHIGARAKI IN ŌMI PROVINCE.

WHERE ARE WE, HANZŌ?

IT'S ONLY A THREE-DAY JOURNEY.

I WONDER IF WE CAN MAKE IT BACK TO OKAZAKI.

WE WILL SPEND THE NIGHT AT A TOWN CALLED OGAWA FURTHER AHEAD.

I CAN'T HELP FEELING THAT WAY.
I KNOW, BUT WE MAY NOT GET THERE EVEN IF WE TRAVEL FOR A YEAR.

I'LL HAVE MORE.
THE FOOD TASTES GOOD.

SNORR
SNORR
SNORR
SNORR
SNARR
ZAAA

BUT, MILORD.

YES. I'M THINKING OF PASSING THROUGH TSUGE, KABUTO, AND SEKI. THEN WE'LL COME OUT IN ISE SHIROKO.

WE'RE ABOUT TO ENTER THE MOUNTAINS OF IGA, RIGHT?

HM?

AND YET YOU HAD GREAT APPETITE AND YOU SLEPT BETTER THAN I'VE EVER SEEN, WITH A DREADFULLY LOUD SNORE.

YOU SAID YOU FELT LIKE WE MAY NEVER REACH HOME EVEN IF WE TRAVELED FOR A YEAR.

I THINK NOW I UNDER-STAND WHY.

MITSUHIDE HAD TO KILL NOBUNAGA-*DONO*.

HEH HEH HEH HEH.

HEH.

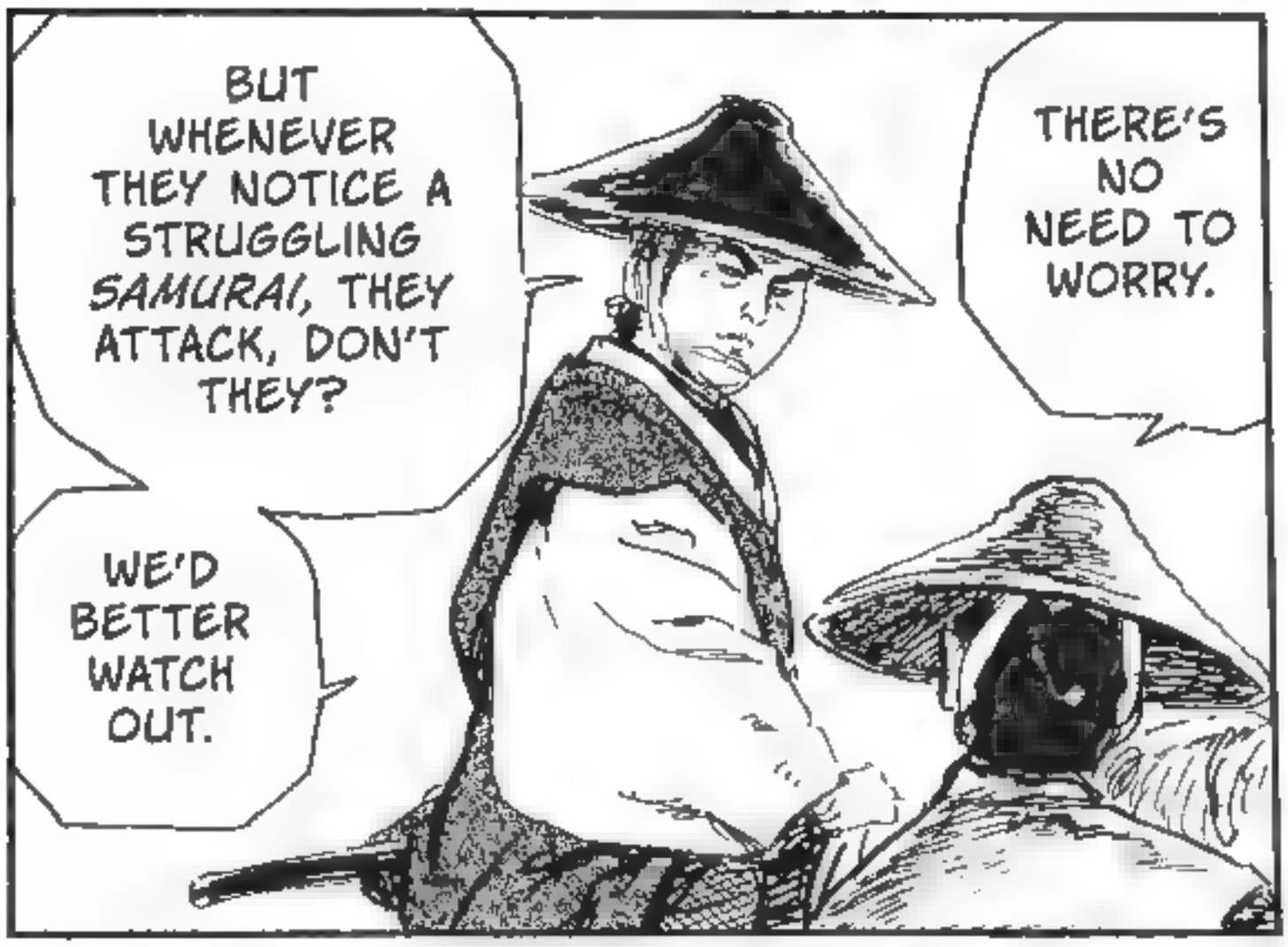
...AND I RELAX BETTER AT NIGHT.

EVEN THOUGH PEOPLE THOUGHT I WAS UNITED WITH NOBUNAGA-*DONO* AND THEY CALLED IT THE ODA-TOKUGAWA ALLIANCE...DESPITE ALL THIS, I RELISH FOOD MORE...

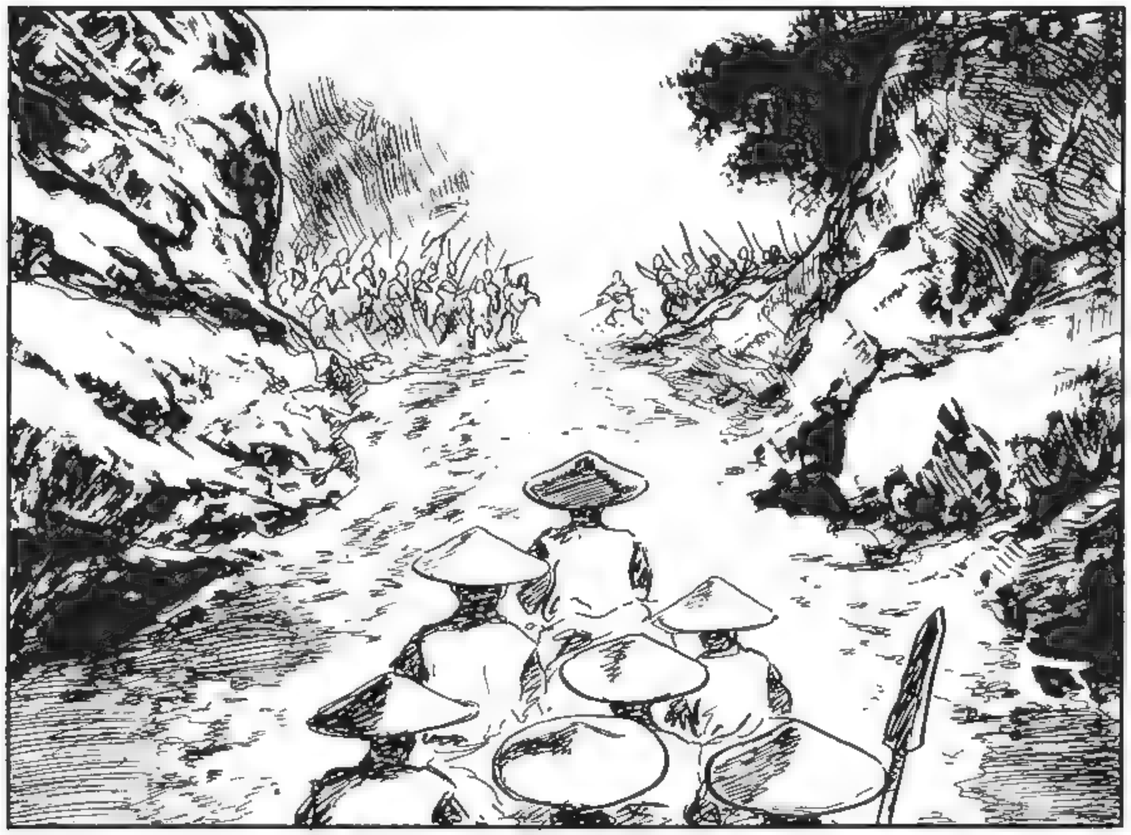
YES?

YOU KNOW WHAT, HANZŌ?

I'M BEGINNING TO SEE LOCALS HERE AND THERE.


BUT WHENEVER THEY NOTICE A STRUGGLING *SAMURAI*, THEY ATTACK, DON'T THEY?
WE'D BETTER WATCH OUT.
THERE'S NO NEED TO WORRY.

I BET THEY'LL GATHER FOLKS AND COME BACK!



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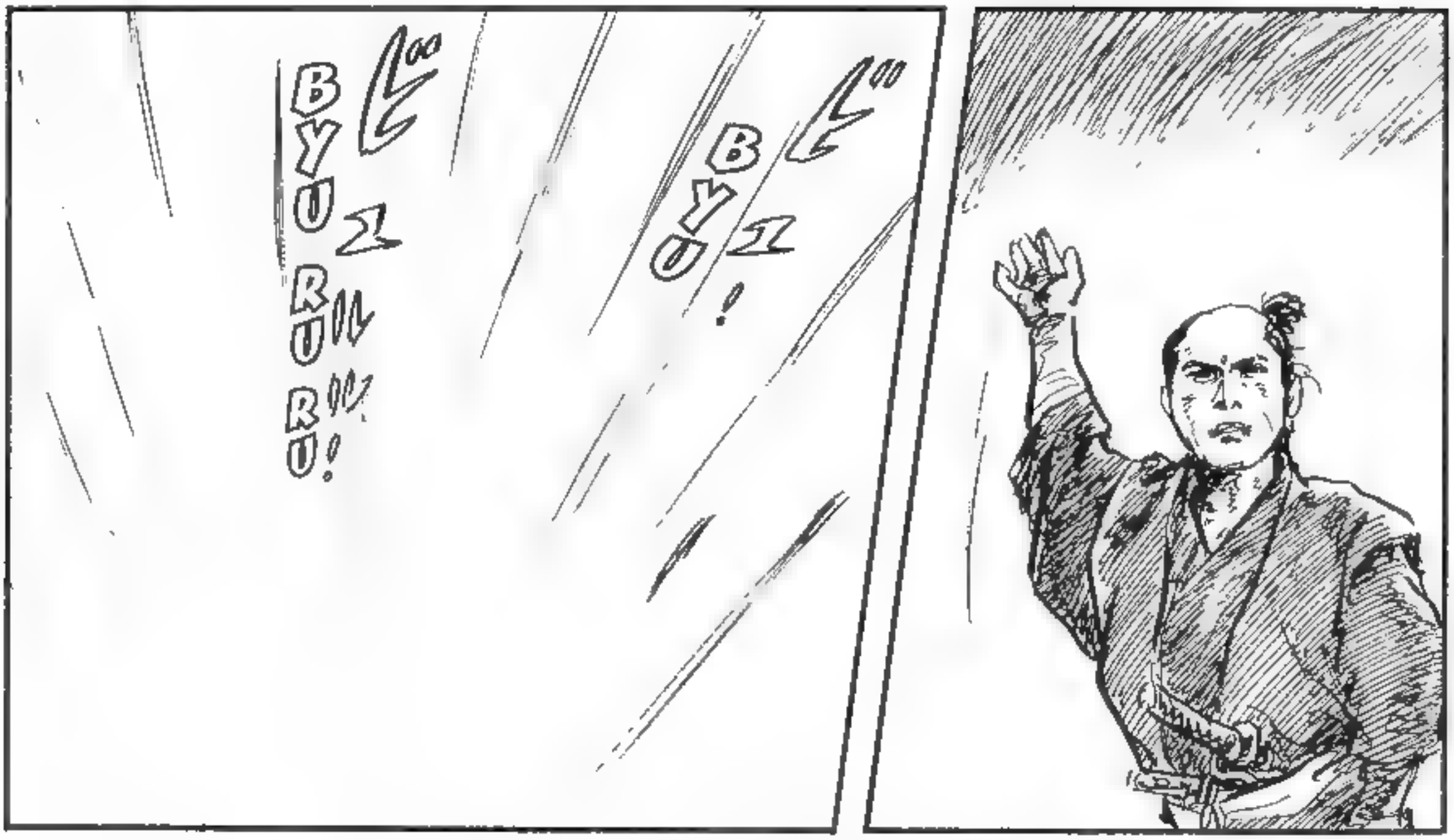
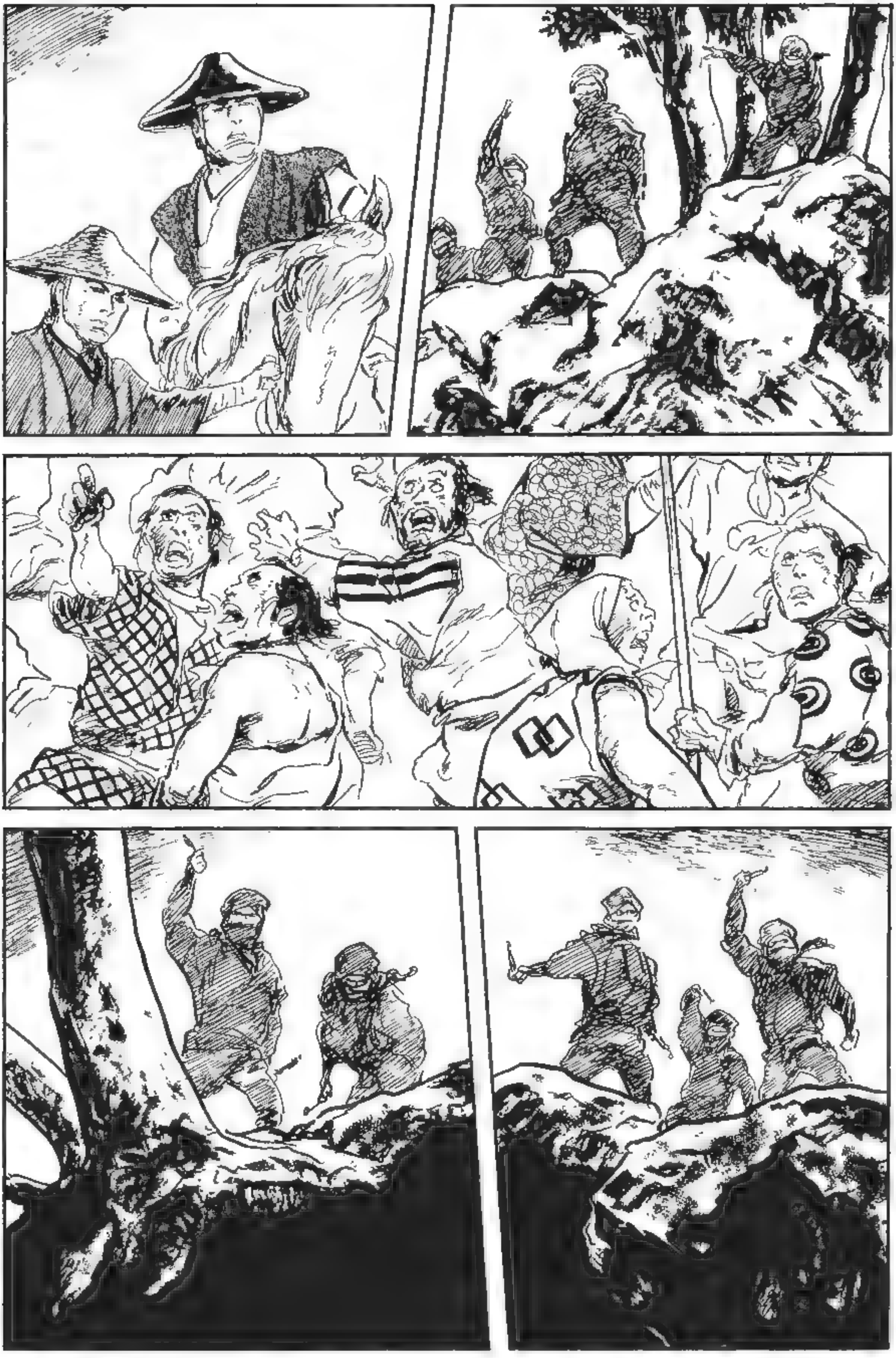
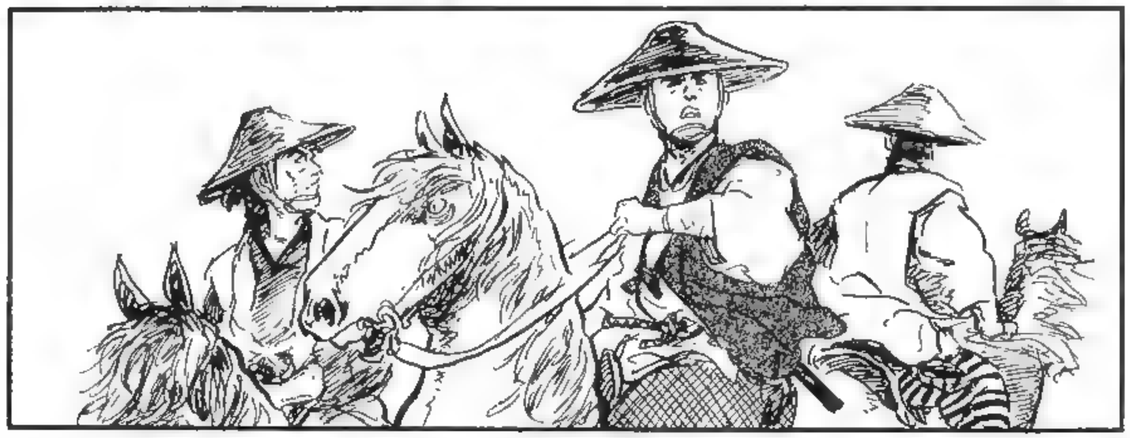

BYU
BYU
BYU!
BYU!



WHO...
WHO ARE
THEY?



MILORD, WE ARE IN IGA. MY FATHER TOO WAS THE HEAD OF IGA AND SERVED TOKUGAWA.

MY MEN AND FAMILY, OVER THREE HUNDRED OF THEM.

THEY ARE *IGAMONO.*

HA HA HA HA HA.

AH!

HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA

GLOSSARY

Asakura Yoshikage
(1533–1573) A notable feudal lord of Echizen. It is known that the greatest character flaw of Yoshikage was indecision. As the years passed, Yoshikage decided to serve under the likes of Azai Nagamasa, even launching a pincer attack strategy against Oda Nobunaga. But he failed in the task of capturing him. During the battle of Anegawa, he was defeated before he even reached the battlefield. In the year of 1573 he was sadly betrayed even by his own men, and he was forced to kill himself.

ashinaka
A half-size *waraji*. *Waraji* are sandals made from straw rope that in the past were the standard footwear of the common people in Japan.

Azuchi
Located in Shiga Prefecture, Azuchi Castle was one of the primary castles of Oda Nobunaga.

Eshū
Another name for Ōmi Province. Ōmi Province is an old province of Japan which today comprises Shiga Prefecture.

fūrinkazan
Literally, "wind, forest, fire, and mountain." It was the battle flag used by Takeda Shingen, quoting *The Art of War*: "Move as swift as a wind, stay as silent as the forest, attack fierce like fire, unmovable defense like a mountain."

goshuinjō
A letter bearing the "august vermilion seal," which gave certain authority to the holder of the letter.

Hanzō no mon
"Hanzō's gate."

Hōjō Ujimasa
(1538–1590) The fourth head of the late Hōjō clan, and *daimyō* of Odawara.

honorifics
Japan is a class and status society, and proper forms of address are critical. Common markers of respect are the prefixes *o* and *go*, and a wide range of suffixes. Some of the suffixes you will encounter in *Path of the Assassin*:
dono – archaic, used for higher-ranked or highly respected figures.
sama – used for superiors. Sometimes spoken as "*saa*."
san – the most common, used among equals or near equals.

Igamono
"Men of Iga."

ikkō-ikki
The Japanese *ikkō-ikki*, literally "single-minded leagues," were mobs of peasant farmers and low-status samurai who rose up against samurai rule in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. They followed the beliefs of Jodo Shinshu Buddhism, which taught that all believers are equally saved by Amida Buddha's grace.

kanji
A Japanese system of writing based on borrowed or modified Chinese characters.

Kawachi
Kawachi was a province of Japan, which today composes the southeastern part of Ōsaka Prefecture.

keishitsu
A lawful wife, but not the first lawful wife. Men had *keishitsu* only when their first lawful wife was no longer around (either because the first wife died or they divorced).

Kuki Yoshitaka
In the 1570s, Kuki allied himself with Oda Nobunaga and commanded his fleet, supporting land-based attacks on the *ikkō-ikki*. In 1574, his aid ensured a victory for Nobunaga in his third attempt to attack the Nagashima fortress.

kyorai
Kyo (leave) + *rai* (come).

measurements
li – one *li* is about 3.927 kilometers.
jō one *jō* is approximately ten feet.
shaku – one *shaku* is approximately one foot.
sun – one *sun* is slightly less than an inch.

Mōri clan
The Mōri clan was a family of *daimyō*, descended from Oe no Hiromoto and established in Aki Province.

nirinsō
Japanese woodland anemone (*Anemone flaccida*). Literally, *nirinso* translates to "two-flower plant."

Oda Nobutada
(1557–1582) The eldest son of Oda Nobunaga, and a samurai who fought in many battles of the Sengoku period. He became the captain general of the war against Matsunaga Hisahide and the war against the Takeda clan as a successor of Nobunaga.

onii-sama
Older brother

Sakai Tadatsugu
(1527–1596) One of the most notable officers under Tokugawa Ieyasu. After the year of 1560, when Tadatsugu helped Ieyasu split his ties with the Imagawa, Tadatsugu was given command of Yoshida Castle.

seppuku
Ritual suicide by disembowelment formerly practiced by samurai. Also called hara-kiri

Taira no Kiyomori
Legend tells that 800 years ago, Taira no Kiyomori, a court general who established the first samurai-dominated administrative government, opened a strait by beckoning the setting sun back with his golden fan.

Takatenjin Castle
A small, but still strong, mountain castle, which used to stand in Shizuoka.

Takeda Nobuzane
Takeda Shingen's younger brother.

Takigawa Kazumasu
(1525–1586) A samurai retainer to Oda Nobunaga, and later Toyotomi Hideyoshi, during Japan's Sengoku period.

Tōtōmi Province
An old province in the area of Japan that is today western Shizuoka Prefecture.

KAZUO KOIKE

Though widely respected as a powerful writer of graphic fiction, Kazuo Koike has spent a lifetime reaching beyond the bounds of the comics medium. Aside from co-creating and writing such classic manga as *Lone Wolf and Cub* and *Crying Freeman,* Koike has hosted the popular *Shibi Golf Weekly* instructional television program; founded the *Albatross View* golf magazine; produced movies; written popular fiction, poetry, and screenplays; and mentored some of Japan's best manga talent.

Koike started the *Gekiga Sonjuku,* a college course aimed at helping talented writers and artists—such as *Ranma 1/2* creator Rumiko Takahashi—break into the comics field. His methods and teachings continue to influence new generations of manga creators, not to mention artists and writers around the world. Examples of Koike's influence range from the comics works of Frank Miller and Stan Sakai to the films of Quentin Tarantino.

The driving focus of Koike's narrative is character development, and his commitment to the character is clear: "Comics are carried by characters. If a character is well-created, the comic becomes a hit." Kazuo Koike's continued success in comics and literature has proven this philosophy true.

Kazuo Koike continues to work in the entertainment media to this very day, consistently diversifying his work and forging new paths across the rough roads of Edo-period history and the green swaths of today's golfing world.

GOSEKI KOJIMA

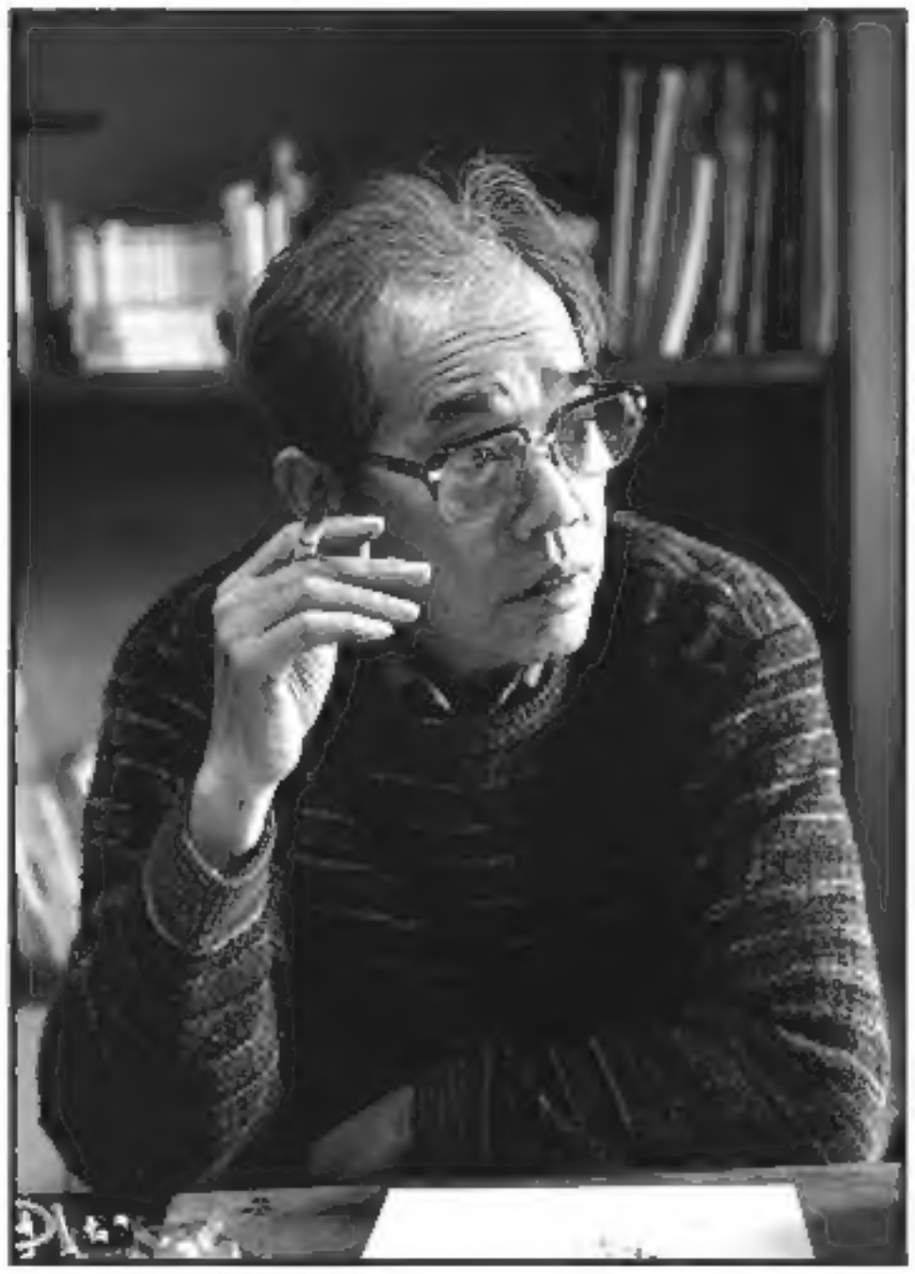
Goseki Kojima was born on November 3, 1928, the very same day as the godfather of Japanese comics, Osamu Tezuka. Art was a Kojima family tradition, his own father an amateur portrait artist and his great-great-grandfather a sculptor.

In 1950, Kojima moved to Tokyo, where the postwar devastation had given rise to special manga forms for audiences too poor to buy the new manga magazines just starting to reach the newsstands. Kojima created art for *kami-shibai,* or "paper-play" narrators, who would use manga story sheets to present narrated street plays, and later moved on to creating works for the *kashi-bon* market, bookstores that rented out books, magazines, and manga to mostly low-income readers.

In 1967, Kojima broke into the magazine market with his ninja adventure, *Dojinki.* As the manga magazine market grew and diversified, he turned out a steady stream of popular samurai manga series.

In 1970, in collaboration with Kazuo Koike, Kojima began the work that would seal his reputation, *Kozure Okami* (*Lone Wolf and Cub*). Many additional series would follow, including *Path of the Assassin* and *Samurai Executioner.*

In his final years, Kojima turned to creating original graphic novels based on the movies of his favorite director, the great Akira Kurosawa. Kojima passed away on January 5, 2000, at the age of seventy-one.



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